

# DANTE STUDIES

with the Annual Report  
of the Dante Society



CXXIX

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2011

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CXXIX

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RICHARD LANSING

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# Allen Mandelbaum, 1926–2011

ANTHONY OLD CORN

Internationally recognized translator of the classical heritage—Greek, Latin, and Italian—and a poet in his own right, Allen Mandelbaum, born in Albany, New York, on May 4, 1926, died on October 27, 2011, after a protracted illness, in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. He had been W. R. Kenan Jr. Professor of Humanities at Wake Forest University, the last of many prestigious academic appointments, from 1989 to 2008. Mandelbaum previously taught at Columbia, Cornell, Hunter College, and, from 1964, at the newly created Graduate Center of the City University of New York, where he chaired the doctoral program in English and Comparative Literature for some twenty years, with parenthetical appointments at Washington University in Saint Louis, Missouri, the University of Houston, the University of Colorado at Boulder, the University of Denver and Purdue University in Indiana, where he was also the recipient of an honorary degree (as he was from Notre Dame and Turin and Cassino in Italy). At the University of Turin, where he taught for five years, he was the first American recipient of an honorary professorial chair *per chiara fama* (“for clear or undisputed fame”).

Mandelbaum is survived by his wife Marjorie, their son Jonathan, a professional translator, Jonathan’s wife Anne, and his two grandchildren Elisa and Nicholas. Under the pen name of Margherita Bogat, Marjorie cotranslated with her husband the late Maria Corti’s *Introduction to Literary Semiotics* [*Principi della comunicazione letteraria* (Bompiani, 1976)] (Indiana University Press, 1978). Working deep into the night and often through it, Allen appears to have translated just about everything else. His service to Italian literature as a translator won him the Mondello, Leonardo, Biella, Lerici-Pea, Montale, and Circe-Sabaudia prizes. In June 2000, on



the 735th anniversary of Dante's birth, he was awarded the Gold Medal of Honor of the City of Florence.

But a mere recital of Mandelbaum's awards and accomplishments risks making him sound far more solemn and remote than he was in reality. Whatever else he was—and for so mercurial a character the cliché “many things to many people” is hard to resist—it is at the same time no contradiction to say that Allen was one of a kind. A striking figure, his hieratic singularity is captured, for instance, in master engraver Barry Moser's woodcut caricature, in his Pennyroyal illustrated edition of Lewis Carroll's *Alice*, of a bearded Allen in the role of the Mad Hatter. It is the oblique positioning of the pince-nez that makes the portrait look far more menacing than Allen ever was in reality. The testimonials of his students and colleagues, American and Italian, bear witness instead to his warmth and generosity, as well as to the inspiration of his teaching and the acuteness of his critical suggestions. Many younger poets, scholars, and translators—in Italy Franco Buffoni, founder of the periodical *Testo a fronte*, comes to mind; in the United States, Charles Stanley Ross, translator of Statius—have been fulsome in their recognition of his unstinting encouragement as guide and mentor. The decision to cast Allen in the Hatter's role was no doubt an insider's reference to the fact that he habitually wore a hat, both indoors and out—a reflection, perhaps, of his rabbinical upbringing?—and possessed a large selection of more or less outlandish headgear to choose from. This sartorial tic was by no means the only trait to link this poet errant with Matthew Arnold's *Scholar-Gipsy*, who, “in hat of antique shape, and cloak of grey,” was glimpsed by the Oxford country-folk, who marked “[his] outlandish garb, [his] figure spare, [His] dark vague eyes, and soft abstracted air.” (In memory I see Allen's eyes, like Athena's, as grey, though the consensus among his surviving family members is that they were actually hazel.)

Another covert cultural reference to our subject is contained in the character of Uncle Victor in Paul Auster's 1989 novel *Moon Palace*. Mandelbaum was in fact Auster's uncle and instrumental in steering him toward a literary career. The boxes of books bequeathed to the novel's protagonist Marco Stanley Fogg (an Ellis Island corruption of the family name of Fogelman), and dutifully read and subsequently sold by him to a penny-pinching secondhand New York bookseller, corresponded to a library left for safe keeping by his Europe-bound Uncle Allen at Auster's family home in the Maplewood suburb of Newark, New Jersey. And,

speaking of homes, it is worth mentioning that the Mandelbaum Gate—not an imposing architectural structure like the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, not much more in fact than a gap in the fence separating the Israeli and Jordanian sectors of Jerusalem from 1948 to 1967—got its name from the proximity of the residence, built by Allen’s paternal grandfather, of those members of the Mandelbaum clan who remained behind.

Allen was not an assiduous letter-writer, and his phone calls tended to be monologues—chronicles of recent events and encounters rather than arguments or demonstrations—beginning (and ending) *in medias res* (his sign-off phrase was “to be continued . . .”) and bristling with first names: Gigliola and Donatella, Stan and Toni, Marialuisa, Barry, Paolo, Richard, Chet and Michael, Irma, Teo, Ezio and Cesare, Bob, Thomas, Jonathan, Wayne, Gale and Walter, Pieraldo, Olga and Vittore, and so on and so forth. It was assumed that his interlocutor (usually addressed with an Italianate vocative as “dear”) would be familiar with the entire catalogue of his extensive acquaintance. One eventually caught on to the fact that the effusive acknowledgments contained in the final paragraphs of the baroque prefaces to his many publications supplied most of the missing family names and provided clues to their geographical distribution throughout the United States and Europe. If the callee was not immediately available, an unfamiliar first responder in Italy would be abruptly requested to report that the caller was “Allen.” The name “Allen” was then spelled out in the Italian equivalent of the phonetic alphabet, which uses the names of cities. So, “Allen” became “Ancona, Livorno, Livorno, Empoli, Napoli.” With the result that at least one administrative assistant in Bologna, unfamiliar with the code and extrapolating the speaker’s noted itinerancy into a species of ubiquity, was invariably left stammering: “Allen called . . . from Ancona, . . . Livorno . . . Livorno . . . Empoli . . . Napoli . . . *ma è possibile?*”

Allen’s parents were both immigrants to the United States. On July 31, 1923, in Toronto, Canada, 25-year-old Rabbi Albert Naftali Mandelbaum (1897–1971), an émigré from the Palestinian Mandate residing in Albany, New York, married 20-year-old Leah Gordon (1903–1984), a naturalized Canadian of Russian Jewish origin, born in Smorgon, Belorussia, and herself the daughter and first child of revered rabbi Jacob Gordon. Allen had something of a peripatetic childhood, living in Albany barely a year, then in Louisville, Toronto, Troy, and Chicago, before settling in

New York City at the age of 13. After graduating from Yeshiva University, he earned a master's degree from Columbia in 1946 and a doctorate from the same institution in 1951 in English and Comparative Literature. In 1951 he was one of eight scholars elected to a coveted three-year Junior Fellowship in Harvard's Society of Fellows, described (by a Harvard insider) as "an elite within an elite, Harvard's Harvard" (<http://harvardmagazine.com/1998/11/genius.html>). (Noam Chomsky was a recipient of the same honor in the same year in the field of Linguistics.) Without impugning the value of the PhD, the founders of the Society sought "to provide an alternative path more suited to the encouragement of the rare and independent genius." In fostering Mandelbaum's development, they appear to have succeeded. Thinking back on his compelling presence, indeed, it is the nineteenth-century figure of the literary genius that springs to mind—a flamboyance successfully cultivated in the twentieth by Yeats and Pound or by Italy's Giuseppe Ungaretti—a poet Allen frequented and translated. The promised volumes (announced with the Dantesque title of *Convivio*) collecting Mandelbaum's published translations of a number of major twentieth-century Italian poets—including, besides Ungaretti (dedicatee of Mandelbaum's *Aeneid*), Eugenio Montale (who under the *senhal* of Clizia concealed the identity of Irma Brandeis, an early Mandelbaum booster), Sicilian Salvatore Quasimodo, Catholic skeptic Giovanni Giudici, and Catholic moralist David Maria Turollo—are still awaiting publication, as is Allen's collected English verse.

Mandelbaum is perhaps best known for his translation of Dante Alighieri's *Comedy*, published by the University of California Press in a hard-cover edition and illustrated by Barry Moser (*Inferno*, 1980, *Purgatorio*, 1982, *Paradiso*, 1984), and subsequently in an inexpensive annotated paperback edition in the Bantam Classics series. It remains, after thirty years, the Dante of choice wherever close contact between the translated text and Dante's original is the teacher's or the reader's goal. Though unmentioned in Eric Griffiths's and Matthew Reynolds's *Dante in English* (Penguin, 2005)—British reviewers have in general tended to ignore Mandelbaum's versions—it was the first English verse translation done by a translator thoroughly familiar with the entire Italian (and non-Italian) exegetical tradition—and it shows. An annotator of Dante's text in Allen's translation quickly discovered that his glosses, based, he hoped, on a judicious reading of the state-of-the-art Italian commentaries, were often superfluous. Mandelbaum's version already took into account the most

recent scholarly research and interpretive speculation, thus lending full support to his claim or disclaimer, in his introduction to his 1980 version of the *Inferno* (I cite it also as a typically rhapsodical, exuberant, and alliterative sample of the Mandelbaumian Pleonastic Ploy or the Style Synonymical): “Sages, Elders, Emenders, Perpenders. Paraphrasts, Querists, Amphibolists, Nebulists, Quandarists, Rhetors, Wreckers, Embalmers, Bores and Picadors—so many Exegetes, living and dead, from Dante’s time to our own time have contributed, at some point, to the understandings and misunderstandings that, over two decades, have made this translation possible.”

Allen’s translation of Virgil’s *Aeneid* (University of California Press, 1972) won the National Book Award in 1973. In 1990 California published his version of Homer’s *Odyssey* with engravings by Marialuisa de Romans (the text alone is reproduced in the Bantam Classics edition, 1991). His translation of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (Harcourt, 1993), likewise illustrated by Marialuisa de Romans, was chosen as a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1994.

Allen was well known in Italy, where he lived for eleven years, receiving a number of the country’s highest awards, which culminated in the Presidential Cross of the Order of the Star of Italian Solidarity. In 2000 he became the first translator to receive the Gold Medal of Honor from the city of Florence, for his translation of Dante’s *Comedy*. A selection of his own witty, allusive, erudite, and at the same time lyrical verse—which included the volumes *Journeyman* (New York, Schocken, 1967), *Leaves of Absence* (New York, Living Hand, 1976), *Chelmaxioms: The Maxims, Axioms, Maxioms of Chelm* (Boston, David Godine, 1978), *A Lied of Letterpress* for Moser and McGrath (West Hatfield, Mass., Pennyroyal, 1980) and *The Savantasse of Montparnasse* (New York, Sheep Meadow, 1988)—was translated into Italian and published under the title *Le porte di eucalipto* (Milan, 2007) by Alessandro Carrera. Several of the privately printed original volumes are no longer in print, though most are preserved in the Z. Smith Reynolds Library at Wake Forest University, to which Allen donated his papers. Nevertheless, a reprint in a single volume of his collected verse would make available a poetic opus that has been unjustly neglected. As an anthologist, he coedited with Robert D. Richardson Jr., the massive nonelitist anthology of American poetry *Three Centuries of American Poetry* (1999), reissued as *A Treasury of American Poetry* (2003).

Despite (or perhaps because of) his exotic background, Allen was a typical New Yorker and thought nothing (to my horror as a frugal Lancastrian) of taking a taxicab from Turin to Bologna. In Imola we dined at the San Domenico, and Allen urged Gianluigi Morini to open a restaurant in New York (which he did). Allen himself, however, was a frugal host at 939 Madison Avenue, whence we would repair to a nearby deli for a pastrami on rye. His stays at Orta San Giulio on Lake Orta were a source of dear and vivid memories. Bologna, Turin, Ravenna, Florence, Pescara, Siracusa, Rome, Milan, La Punt, Cadorago, Los Angeles, Winston-Salem . . . What larks, Allen, what larks! As Hamlet said, almost, "He was a Mensch, take him for all in all; / I shall not look upon his like again."

*Wellesley, Massachusetts*

# Coin of the Realm: Dante and the Simonists

MICHAEL SHERBERG

*Remembering Fredi Chiappelli, 20 years later*

Early on in *The Undivine Comedy*, Teodolinda Barolini crisply summarizes the *Commedia*'s rhetorical strategy, noting that "we approach the poem through the lens of its own fiction treated as dogma." Such an approach, she continues, carries risk: "Treating its fiction as objective reality, we neglect to remember that Dante is a creator and that his system of classification, for all its apparent objectivity, is a representation (and a rather arbitrary and idiosyncratic one at that) designed to promote the illusion of objectivity."<sup>1</sup> By Barolini's reading the *Commedia* becomes a prescriptive work masquerading as a descriptive one; Dante promotes his notion of how the afterlife should be through a poem that claims to record what the afterlife is. While the poet's various addresses to his reader have encouraged the notion that the messages contained therein are meant for us, one may equally conjecture that his ideal addressee is God himself, to whom the poet is indicating not only how but which sinners should be punished and saints rewarded. Such nudges to God account for the political stances expressed in the poem, and for the way that Dante sometimes associates sin with politics. Dante *viator* finds comfort in the discovery in Hell of his bitterest enemies, but Dante the poet has exploited the pretext of sin as a way of calling down God's wrath upon them.

Nowhere is this practice more evident than in *Inferno* 19, the canto of the simonists. It is here that Dante takes an unusual step: by exploiting his

own attribution to the damned of the ability to see the future, he anticipates the arrival of one of his bitterest political enemies, Boniface VIII. In itself a brilliant finesse, the invocation of Boniface has also worked a distorting effect on readings of the poem. Though absent from the bolgia of the simonists, Boniface has become almost too strong a presence in the canto, an organizing principle for readings of the text. The attention to Boniface is moreover symptomatic of a wider critical practice, the hardening of a consensus around certain textual loci at the expense of others. The passages that have exerted a magnetic pull on readers include Dante's autobiographical reference to the baptistery incident, dubbed by Giorgio Petrocchi a "caso assolutamente singolare e rarissimo";<sup>2</sup> the insertion of Boniface into the infernal order; and Dante's diatribe about simony in general and the Donation of Constantine in particular. The *contrapasso*, on the other hand, has received at times but glancing attention, as if its mechanisms were too obvious to merit much discussion. In particular the critical eye tends to focus on the insertion of the simonists into the *fori* of the infernal landscape and their punishment with fire. Far less ink has been spilled over the second part of the *contrapasso*, in which the simonists are squashed flat below the surface of Hell.<sup>3</sup> This is a curious development, because it tends to ignore a predicate, which I believe is implicit in the rhetoric of the *Commedia*, that every detail matters, because every detail records some aspect of God's will. What has escaped notice, consequently, is the remarkable dual-phase structure of the punishment itself, and the implications of the second phase.

Rather than be immediately final, the *pena* of the simonists is a punishment by process.<sup>4</sup> These sinners suffer in two phases: there is an initial period when their legs protrude from the holes into which they have plunged, flames dancing at their feet, and a second period, which begins with the arrival of a successor, in which their souls are crushed flat deeper within those same holes. In overlooking the second phase of the *contrapasso*, readings of the canto have missed important connections between these elements and have failed to synthesize the two phases into a single theory of the punishment. In what follows I undertake to do just that, while also revisiting the much-heralded textual loci in order to offer new interpretations of them within the context of the *contrapasso*.

Simony, as is known, consists of commerce in spiritual goods. Punished in the third of the eighth circle's ten bolge, it represents a case of ordinary

fraud, which Virgil distinguishes in *Inferno* 11 from treacherous fraud specifically because it relies on a relationship of mistrust: “La frode, ond’ogne coscienza è morsa, / può l’omo usare in colui che ’n lui fida / e in quel che fidanza non imborsa” (*Inf.* 11.52–54). Dante’s use of the verb *imborsare* suggests that each *bolgia* is also a *borsa*, though Pope Nicholas’s use of the latter noun in *Inferno* 19 will also acquire a more specific meaning. To judge from Dante’s description of the *bolgia* in *Inferno* 19, there is abundant room for simonists. He describes a landscape “per le coste e per lo fondo / piena la pietra livida di fori” (*Inf.* 19.13–14), each of the same diameter.<sup>5</sup> Dante explicitly associates the *fori* with baptism through a reference to his “bel san Giovanni,” the Florentine baptistery, though one would do well to remember that a *foro* is both a hole and a place of exchange, either of goods or ideas.<sup>6</sup> The poet’s insistence that these *fori* are holes thus tends to limit the interpretive possibilities that the noun allows, particularly given the fact that simony requires an exchange, albeit a fraudulent one. Indeed, the episode itself will transform the *foro* into something else as it advances its thematic purpose.

Dante’s vision of the *fori* leads to the brief but much-debated digression about the events in the Florentine baptistery. Here is the text in question:

Non mi parean men ampi né maggiori  
che que’ che son nel mio bel San Giovanni,  
fatti per luogo de’ battezzatori;  
l’un de li quali, ancor non è molt’ anni,  
rupp’ io per un che dentro v’annegava:  
e questo sia suggel ch’ ogn’uomo sganni.  
(*Inf.* 19.16–21)

Interpretation of the second tercet hinges on the reference attaching to the pronoun *questo*. Three schools of thought predominate, summarized by Susan Noakes as part of her proposed reading, and it is striking that not much has changed on the critical landscape since that essay appeared in 1968. The first reading, which Noakes traces back to Luigi Rocca’s 1919 essay but which in fact has more distant origins in Pietro di Dante’s account of the baptistery incident, would have *questo* refer to the “un che dentro v’annegava,” invoking the saved man as witness to attest to Dante’s motives when he broke the font or container, whatever it was.<sup>7</sup> This reading has provoked a number of objections, principally that it renders the account banal, reducing it to a self-defense that has no further import



for the canto or the *Commedia*. Also, as Dante Della Terza has pointed out, for *questo* to refer to “un che dentro v’annegava” the pronoun should properly be *questi*, as in “chi è questi che mostra ‘l cammino?” (*Inf.* 15.48); Della Terza finds this “lexical confusion” to be “the revealing signal of a critical operation which stresses as an absolute priority, the autobiographical authenticity of Dante’s conclusive remark. . . .”<sup>8</sup> The second theory, initiated by Leo Spitzer, reads *questo* as both analeptic and proleptic, referring to the account of the incident and alluding to what follows in the canto: “as a prelude to his picture of the popes in Hell, trapped headfirst in a pit, Dante tells us: ‘let this picture which I am developing (*questo*) be to you a picture of the exemplary punishment (*suggel*) which may open the eyes of Everyman to the ultimate fate of sinners (*ogni uomo sganni*).’”<sup>9</sup> The primary objection to this reading, coming again from Della Terza, is that in the *Commedia* Dante consistently uses *questo* as an analeptic signifier, not a proleptic one: “‘e questo’ is always conclusive and never anticipatory.”<sup>10</sup> The third theory, which predates Spitzer’s and to which his is related, would have *questo* refer to the two preceding lines, Dante’s statement itself being the *suggel*.<sup>11</sup> The first two schools of thought remained somewhat stalemated until Noakes published her essay on the canto, which undertook to synthesize the autobiographical and the linguistic approaches. While her allegorical construct remains suggestive for many reasons, Noakes to my mind does not finally solve the problem, because she offers no firm evidence that the historical background she wishes to attribute to the incident, recounted in Dino Campagni’s *Cronica*, bears any direct relation to Dante’s remark.

Of these different approaches, the ones most consistent with a notion of the *Commedia* as a self-contained unit, harboring the keys to its own meaning, are those, such as Spitzer’s, that look more to text than to context.<sup>12</sup> Spitzer correctly identifies the problem as one of syntax, though without furnishing an adequate solution. The period itself constructs a series of references that follow from the *fori* of the infernal landscape. To the size of these *fori* Dante compares the width, “Non . . . men ampi né maggiori,” of analogous *fori* in the baptistery, “*que*’ che son nel mio bel San Giovanni.” The comparison involves a significant slip, from the measurement of the space to the container itself (“l’un de li quali”), which Dante says he broke in order to save a drowning person (“un che dentro v’annegava”). If we apply the rule for the pronoun *questo*, according to which it refers back to the nearest noun or pronoun of the same gender

and number, then *questo* may be taken to refer to “l’un de li quali,” in other words, to the structure that defines the *foro* it encloses.

While the lessons of traditional stylistic criticism may not enjoy much currency anymore, they still come in handy at times, as they do here in calling attention to the *scarto* between the image of the contained and that of the container.<sup>13</sup> Dante constructs his description so as to make the two inseparable from one another and mutually self-defining. Identifying the tension between the physical border of the *foro* and the space it encloses helps one understand Dante’s purpose, namely, to emphasize the relation between the physical and the metaphysical, the earthly practice of baptism and its transcendental implications. The stone frame is the signifier, the space it defines the signified, the latter a blessing or a curse depending on the choices each person makes as to what to do with the gift of baptism. What undeceives all of us is the baptismal structure as potential and fulfillment. That Dante begins with the infernal *foro* and works back to the baptismal structure, a metonymy for the transcendental ritual of baptism, suggests how the space defined by the structure is one of choice, damnation or salvation *in fieri*. The dual-phase punishment of the simonists alludes to these possibilities as they extend from baptism. The first phase offers a negative analogy to baptism itself and its promise, while the later crushing represents the fulfillment of the potential implicit in the initial punishment by fire. The two autobiographical discourses in the canto confirm as much. Dante tells a story of salvation, Nicholas one of perdition, and both are centered in analogous structures.

The slippage that led Dante to associate the *foro* with the baptismal structure has another source as well. The initial presentation of a vast, lonely scenery turns out to have been deceptive, as Dante now describes a new element: from each *foro* there springs a pair of legs, exposed perhaps below the knees but possibly as far as the thighs,<sup>14</sup> which dance with flames. This inverted position of the shades is as much a stimulus to Dante’s recollection of the baptistery as is the size of the *fori*. The flames, on the other hand, represent a novel element. In his reading of this canto Antonino Pagliaro explains them as the inverse of a halo, “che avrebbe avvolto il loro capo, se avessero assolto i loro obblighi di pietà e di carità.”<sup>15</sup> Most critics, however, converge on the idea that the flames parody the Pentecost, the moment at which the apostles received the ability, later coveted by Simon Magus, to confer the benefits of the Holy Spirit

through the laying on of hands.<sup>16</sup> The flames also work an effect of movement on the sinners' legs, forcing the souls to imitate with their feet the sort of compulsively grasping nature that characterized their hands in life, though here one can imagine them grasping—futilely—at the fire itself, in a mockery of Simon Magus's original desire for the gifts attendant to the Pentecost. Dante in fact relates simony to avarice in his diatribe later in the canto: “. . . la vostra avarizia il mondo attrista, / calcando i buoni e sollevando i pravi” (104–5).<sup>17</sup> This remark consolidates a number of notions already inscribed in the canto: the verb *attrista* echoes Dante's address to Nicholas as *anima trista* (47); the gerund *calcando*, linked etymologically to the *calcagni* of verse 30, helps explain the specific punishment of the sinners' feet with fire; and the inversion that Dante describes in the second line lends additional meaning to the sinners' inverted position during their initial period of punishment.

That position is not unique to this punishment. Critics have noted that it anticipates the upside-down position of Satan's legs, once Dante and Virgil turn around as they climb his body to leave Hell, as well as Judas's legs as he dangles from Satan's mouth.<sup>18</sup> In their position and their treatment with flame, the simonists also offer something of a complement to the heretics, consumed by flame in tombs and, when they rise, visible to varying degrees from head to waist.<sup>19</sup> This relation has received some notice, first by Petrocchi, who compared “le arche infuocate degli eretici e i pozzi infiammati dei simoniaci” to a “trama delle analogie nella rappresentazione delle pene,”<sup>20</sup> and more recently and with greater depth by Dante Della Terza, with particular attention to Gregory the Great's attacks on *simoniaca haeresis*.<sup>21</sup> Another source on the relation between simony and heresy ignored in the literature is Thomas Aquinas, who in his *Summa theologiae* begins his *quaestio* devoted to simony by detailing how simony is a form of heresy: “By buying or selling a spiritual thing, a man treats God and divine things with irreverence, and consequently commits a sin of irreligion.”<sup>22</sup> Simony is heresy because “by selling a gift of the Holy Ghost a man declares, in a way, that he is the owner of a spiritual gift; and this is heretical.” Aquinas derives this argument from a statement by Pope Gregory VII: “None of the faithful is ignorant that buying or selling altars, tithes, or the Holy Ghost is the heresy of simony.” Thomas further insists that simony is not a sin of ignorance but rather one of volition: “This act is furthermore described as ‘express,’ in order to signify that it proceeds from choice, which takes the principal part in virtue and vice.” It is, in

other words, a sin “per malo obietto,” as Dante puts it in *Purgatorio* 17.95; the simonist is a heretic because he claims ownership of something that in fact belongs to God, and in doing so he implicitly restates the order of things in a way that is inconsistent with Christian theology. As a form of heresy, for Dante it is also worse than the simple heresy punished in the sixth circle, because it involves an element of fraud, the fraud specifically consisting of the simonist’s self-representation as having something to sell.

Other details further advance the complementarity of simony with heresy. Dante’s description of the expanse of the simonists’ *fori* recalls the earlier description of the endless stretch of the heretics’ *arche*. Each description also uses a similar rhyme: *parte/sparte/arte* in *Inferno* 9 and *parte/parte/arte* in *Inferno* 10, *parte/arte/comparte* in *Inferno* 19.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, both regions find two related, stratified groups of sinners: the heretics and the heresiarchs, and the simonists and the simonist popes. In both instances the major sinners seem to suffer greater punishment than the minor ones, and they attract Dante’s attention—the heresiarchs for their apparently louder cries of pain (“... quai son quelle genti / che, seppellite dentro da quell’ arche, / si fan sentir con li sospir dolenti?” [*Inf.* 9.124–26]), and the simonist pope Nicholas, whose greater flame causes him to kick more violently (“Chi è colui, maestro, che si cruccia / guizzando più che li altri suoi consorti / . . . e cui più roggia fiamma succia?” [*Inf.* 19.31–33]). Virgil’s observation to Dante that “Qui son li eresiarche / co’ lor seguaci, d’ogni setta, e molto / più che non credi son le tombe carche” (*Inf.* 9.127–29), applies as well to the simonists, for whom the visible far outnumber those tucked below. Dante also repeats the notion that the sin consists of leaders and followers in the first line of *Inferno* 19, where he inveighs, “O Simon mago, o miseri seguaci.” And of course, as events unfold we learn that like is buried with like.

The parallelisms between the initial punishment of the simonists and the permanent status of the heretics suggest that in its initial phase, the punishment for simony accounts as well for its heresy. As many readers point out, the simonists find themselves in an inverse position with respect to the heretics because, as they focused on earthly goods in life, specifically precious metals mined from the earth, so in death must they look forever at the earth.<sup>24</sup> The second punishment, the flattening of the soul fully inside the hole, relates instead to the specific act of simony itself, the marketing of things religious. As Nicholas himself explains, the first phase of punishment will end with the arrival of a successor soul. At that point

the soul will be pushed down into the *foro*, squeezed among the cracks in the stone, where he will join a crowd of similar sinners: “Di sotto al capomio son li altri tratti / che precedetter me simoneggiando, / per le fessure de la pietra piatti” (*Inf.* 19.73–75). The specificity of Nicholas’s explanation demands attention since it raises several important questions.

The first question regards the meaning of Dante’s past participle *tratti*. Translators have approached this word variously. Dorothy Sayers has “dragged down,” while Laurence Binyon reads “thrust . . . down.”<sup>25</sup> These opposing translations reflect the fact that the verb *trarre* can mean either to drag or to thrust. Dante leaves no ready clue as to his own intended usage, but literary history may. As the *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* attests, citing tale 94 of the *Novellino*, *trarre* can specifically mean “Trarre, di cavalli, muli, e simili,” a synonym for *calcitrare*.<sup>26</sup> Given Dante’s representation of the pope as constantly kicking (“forte spingava con ambo le piote,” 19.120), one might tend toward this latter meaning, suggesting that the newly arriving soul forces its predecessor more deeply into the hole and in the process crushes it: just as they had made simony normative for their successors while alive, so now do the dead participate in the punishment of the next generation.

What that soul becomes as a result of the process of compression is key here. A clue to the full punishment comes from Nicholas himself, when he describes his sin:

Se di saper ch’i’ sia ti cal cotanto,  
che tu abbi però la ripa corsa,  
sappi ch’i’ fui vestito del gran manto;  
e veramente fui figliuol dell’orsa,  
cupido sì per avanzar gli orsatti,  
che sù l’avere, e qui me misi in borsa.  
(*Inf.* 19.67–72)

The subtle gradation between *misi* in reference to *l’avere* and *misi* with its direct object *me* creates a zeugma, since one cannot literally put oneself in a purse. Now, if the *foro* is the opening of a metaphoric *borsa*, then the *contrapasso* begins to acquire its full shape. Because they trafficked the soul for money, simonists suffer a second, enduring punishment: they are “per le fessure de la pietra piatti.” This line drew the attention of Richard K. Emmerson and Ronald B. Herzman, whose analysis proceeded from the noun *pietra* to a broader discussion of church corruption through the history of St. Peter and Simon Magus.<sup>27</sup> Without taking anything away from

their instructive argument, I would shift the focus slightly to highlight the alliteration in *p*, which actually continues from the previous line: “che precedetter me simoneggiando, / per le fessure de la pietra piatti.” Dante may even provide a hint that we are to read the two lines as a unit by creating a consonance, in *-tt-*, in the first and last alliterative words. The alliteration thus also includes a rhyme word, *piatti* being the third of the chain after *orsatti* and *tratti*. The noun *pietra* is but one of four key words here, the most significant of which may instead be the rhyme word. The verb *precedetter* calls attention to the sequential nature of the punishment, suggesting that as Simon Magus had had *seguaci* so too in the contemporary church there has developed a culture of simony, an environment in which simony is normative.<sup>28</sup> The preposition *per*, which Emerson and Herzman read as suggesting that the souls are squeezed through the fissures in the rock,<sup>29</sup> more likely means, as Natalino Sapegno argues, that they are squeezed among the fissures: after all, there is no indication of what might lie beyond the rock itself.

Now, *piatti*. Sapegno sees the souls as “disposti orizzontalmente e a strati,” a reading that would have the souls fill the fissures in the foundation of the church (the *pietra*) that were of their own making, effecting an ironic justice.<sup>30</sup> Such an imaginative construct does not, however, account for the analogy, instituted by Nicholas himself, between the *foro* and the *borsa*, the pope’s own sense of being inserted in a purse. Della Terza has developed this analogy as follows: “The receiving purse where wealth will be hidden becomes the very hole which now traps Nicholas. The mesmerized eyes of the simonist see the money he was handling transformed into his own body about to be imprisoned in the well of *simonia* forever.”<sup>31</sup> He is correct, but only partially. The money is not truly transformed into the simonist’s body; rather, the simonist’s damned soul is analogous to the *avere* that he put in his *borsa* while alive. The soul’s transformation happens in the second moment, when it is squeezed flat among the cracks. To understand this phase of the punishment one need only think about when one sees the image of a person in a flattened state, particularly in the context of money. The soul, in other words, becomes a coin.<sup>32</sup>

It just so happens that from 1252 on the Florentine florin, which along with the Genoese *genovino* was the first pure gold coin after the Sicilian *augustale*, bore on its obverse a full-length image of John the Baptist standing, with a fleur-de-lis on the reverse.<sup>33</sup> While other contemporary Italian

coins, such as the *augustale* or Lucca's *grosso*, showed head or bust images, the florin followed a tradition of favoring full-length representations of religious figures on its coins.<sup>34</sup> The image of the patron saint of Florence, for whom the baptistery was named—and it is in this that Dante's earlier antonomasia, “nel mio bel san Giovanni,” becomes significant—thus represented the city in its currency. Florence's numismatic history has implications not only for the invective against simony but also as it explains Dante's reference to the baptismal structure—and by extension the baptistery itself—as a “suggel ch' ogn'uomo sganni.” In *Inferno* 30 Dante associates the verb *suggellare* with the coining of money when he has the counterfeiter maestro Adamo recount, “Ivi è Romena, là dov'io falsai / la lega suggellata del Batista” (73–74), a reference to the Florentine florin and the saint's image. The irony of the fact that the image of the Baptist became part and parcel of the acquisition of lucre surely was not lost on Dante, and indeed his remark to Nicholas, “Fatto v'avete Dio d'oro e d'argento” (*Inf.* 19.112), seems almost to allude to how sacred images turn up on coins. If, as I have suggested, the baptismal structure is the *suggel* that undeceives men, it does so by bearing the truth of faith, as opposed to coins, whose religious images can deceive men into thinking that God has somehow sanctioned their avarice. Moreover, when Dante excoriates Nicholas, “e guarda ben la mal tolta moneta / ch'esser ti fece contra Carlo ardito” (*Inf.* 19.98–99), he is being literal, for what the pope sees are his damned predecessors in the form of money.

Dante couples the discovery of the simonists and the description of their punishment with an extended conversation with the damned pope Nicholas. In fact, the sinner makes two speeches during Dante's encounter, each of which assumes a different interlocutor. Paul Renucci has observed that Nicholas “a le gout du langage figuré,”<sup>35</sup> which he deploys in both speeches. The first, in which he addresses Dante as Boniface, has garnered considerable attention principally because of the clever way in which the poet finds a place for Boniface, not yet dead, in Hell, and secondarily for the metaphor of the prostituted church. The second speech has drawn notice for the dead pope's belated confession of how nepotism drove him to simony, less so for how it helps explain the *contrapasso*. Nicholas's mastery of metaphor is important, but for another reason: it has distracted readers from the pope's disingenuousness.<sup>36</sup> That Nicholas should lie to Dante comes as no surprise, for he is after all a purveyor of

frauds. That readers should not take note of the pope's lying nature suggests how distracting the pope's own reference to Boniface has been as well as how easy it is to forget that ordinary fraud is based on a relationship of distrust.

Key to an understanding of Nicholas's two speeches is the setting to which Dante assigns them. Between his first address to the dead pope and Nicholas's reply in which he names Boniface, Dante inserts this tercet: "Io stava come 'l frate che confessa / lo perfido assessin, che poi ch'è fitto, / richiama lui, per che la morte cessa" (*Inf.* 19.49–51). The image has caught its share of attention, principally as it alludes to the Florentine practice of burying convicted murderers alive head-first. This is thus another case in which the canto's historical references have distanced readers from the thematic contributions that such imagery makes to the immediate narrative. The final clause, "per che la morte cessa," in fact attributes a specific purpose on the part of the *assessin*, namely, to delay his own death through conversation with the *frate*. By Dante's description the killer seeks not to clear his conscience but to delay his own burial. In like manner Nicholas may be seen as attempting to put off his own final punishment through his chatty engagement of Dante. One may apply to both sinners the adjective *perfido*, which derives from the Latin *perfidus* ("lacking in faith"): both the killer and the simonist believed that they could sin with impunity. By comparing him to the faithless *assessin*, Dante forewarns his reader to approach the words of the subsequent "confession"—really anything Nicholas has to say—with caution.

The dead pope's two statements to Dante are in fact irreconcilable with each another. He first addresses the *viator*, whom he identifies as Boniface, in curiously outraged terms: "Se' tu sì tosto di quell' aver sazio / per lo qual non temesti tòrre a 'nganno / la bella donna, e poi di farne strazio?" (*Inf.* 19.55–57). Then, after Dante denies that he is Boniface, but without positively identifying himself, Nicholas discloses his own identify: "Se di saper ch'i' sia ti cal cotanto, / che tu abbi però la ripa corsa, / sappi ch'i' fui vestito del gran manto; / e vermente fui figliuol de l'orsa" (*Inf.* 19.67–70). One of these statements can be truthful but not both. If the dead pope in his second speech is alluding to the earlier conversation between Dante and Virgil, in which Virgil had said, "Se tu vuo' ch'i' ti porti / là giù per quella ripa che più giace, / da lui saprai di sé e de' suoi torti" (*Inf.* 19.34–36), then Nicholas has to know upon Dante's arrival that the person addressing him is not Boniface. The damned do not ride piggy-back



to their final place of punishment; they tumble down there upon Minos's command, and Nicholas would know this because it already happened to him. If so, then his statement to "Bonifazio" must be a lie, designed primarily to distract his interlocutor from his own sins by shifting attention to his successor. Dante certainly adds hypocrisy to Nicholas's sins when he has the dead pope pronounce in his accusation the same noun—*avere*—that he will soon use to describe his own behavior.

On the other hand, if Nicholas sincerely mistakes the *viator* Dante for Boniface, then his question to his "successor" becomes yet another of the self-indicting statements that the poet Dante puts in the mouths of his damned. It differs, however, from many others, because if many of the damned willfully lie to Dante,<sup>37</sup> here a Nicholas who cannot identify his interlocutor and therefore mistakes him for Boniface may be taken to speak forthrightly, revealing in three hendecasyllables the *figura* that he fulfills as one ready to cast moral judgments upon others while blind to his own. His inability to see, and therefore to know, Dante, is a metaphor for his blindness to himself, his failure to comprehend his own sinfulness.<sup>38</sup> The speech also reveals an egocentric sinner who cannot conceive of a greater purpose in Dante's having "la ripa corsa" than "di saper ch'i' sia." His lack of moral clarity, symptomatic of simony in general, is reflected in the color of the stone, *livida*, in which the souls are plunged.

Nicholas's two speeches do have a common element, namely, a concern with succession. The remarks about Boniface, about the *orsatti*, and about Clement show that, as he thought about the future in his life, so too does Nicholas worry about it in death. Thus it makes sense that, preoccupied as he was with the future, Nicholas suffers a punishment in which he must examine the past: all he can see before him are the souls of his predecessors. The relationship between predecessor and successor souls also engages the theme of generations that runs throughout the canto. Dante installs this theme in the very first line when he addresses Simon Magus and his *miseri seguaci*: simony is a practice that men pass along to others. Even the Donation of Constantine is implicated in this history: "Ahi, Costantin, di quanto mal fu matre, / non la tua conversion, ma quella dote / che da te prese il primo ricco padre!" (*Inf.* 19.115–17). The double invocation of parenthood—*matre*, *patre*—turns the Donation into a generational event, both as it leads to *mal* and as it passes from parent to offspring.

This generational aspect, part of what I have called a culture of simony, also helps explain the degree of anger that Dante expresses in his invective. Over the course of his diatribe, Dante suggests that past and future will collide. He asks Nicholas sarcastically, “Deh, or mi dì: quanto tesoro volle / Nostro Signore in prima da san Pietro / ch’ei ponesse le chiavi in sua balia? / Certo non chiese se non ‘Viemmi retro’” (*Inf.* 19.90–93). In other words, the future is what lies behind us. Dante suggests as much in the canto’s first line, when he refers to the *miseri seguaci* of Simon Magus who would follow him into the present and beyond, many of whom, as Nicholas remarks, “precedetter me simoneggiando.” In complementary fashion, the history of simony to which Nicholas refers now lies before him, as the dead pope must gaze upon his squished predecessors below. These suggestions of temporal continuity, of a past that flows uninterrupted into the future and a future that looks upon the past, also find expression in the way Dante trains his reader to approach this canto. Readers only learn completely of how the infernal landscape reminds him of the baptistery incident by moving forward through the text, to his revelation that the *fori* that are so reminiscent of the baptistery structures recall the incident to him because there are legs sticking out from them.

Above I suggested that we should read Dante’s word *foro* somewhat punningly, remembering that a *foro* can be both a hole and a place of exchange. The *fori* of the simonists turn out to be just that, for they are where one soul changes places with another as well as the place where money, so to speak, is made. These *fori* represent business as usual. The pattern they form in the infernal landscape is one of corruption, and Dante’s righteous anger reflects as much his sense of impotence as it does his moral outrage. Early in the canto he expresses his appreciation for God’s art: “O somma sapienza, quanta è l’arte / che mostri in cielo, in terra e nel mal mondo, / e quanto giusto tua virtù comparte!” (*Inf.* 19.10–12). Commenting on this tercet, Herzman and William A. Stephany have perceptively observed that “In admiring God’s art and judgment, Dante is, of course, praising his own.”<sup>39</sup> Dante will employ a similar device late in the canto, when he has an approving Virgil carry him gently down to the next *tomba*: the gesture is essentially self-congratulatory, a sign that Dante himself believes he has reached a critical juncture through his speech to Nicholas. At the same time, however, the canto exposes the futility of the diatribe. With its allusion to the succession of simonist popes well into the future, and of corruption that can be retraced to the time of the

apostles, the only registered impact of his speech lies in the frustrated kicking of Dante's interlocutor, whose own moral posturing Dante has belied. The *viator's* outrage finally exposes the limits of a prescriptive rhetoric that masquerades as a descriptive one. The poet's rhetoric, whether directed at man or God, remains an expression of desire for change, not a guarantee of it. As his last and really his only weapon against the social ills he confronts, his is a voice of exile whose armamentarium is empty.

I began this essay by describing a sort of sclerosis in the critical history of this canto, the way in which the tradition has hardened around certain "truths" about the simonists while failing to note other aspects of the episode, such as the *contrapasso*, that might create a denser interpretive grid. In my effort to focus attention on textual details that the tradition has often overlooked, I remain mindful of the fact that other details still demand elucidation as part of an ever-expanding hermeneutic network. Fredi Chiappelli had occasion to comment on the incompleteness of all Dante criticism in the last essay he published before his death in 1990: "Il guaio di chi crede d'aver scoperto qualcosa di diverso nella *Divina Commedia* è di credere che quella scoperta sia definitiva e serva a tutto. Nessuna osservazione di critica dantesca mai spiega tutto, o schiude finalmente un ingresso esclusivo al centro motore della stupenda opera poetica."<sup>40</sup> That *centro motore*, in any event, remains the astonishing genius of the poet, brilliantly redoubled as the genius of God. Dante's description of the damned simonists functions also as a call to God to punish them thusly, a lament for a church that has lost its moral compass, a despairing meditation on a history that marches from past to future, a history that is as much about institutions as it is an institution, and that the force of human will, beginning with his own, may not be sufficient to reverse.

Washington University  
St. Louis, Missouri

## NOTES

1. Teodolinda Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 15.

2. Giorgio Petrocchi, "La prosapia del mago Simone," *Studi Danteschi* 51 (1978): 261.

3. There is no attention to the second phase of punishment in the readings of Paolo Brezzi, "Il canto XIX dell'*Inferno*," *Nuove letture dantesche. Volume secondo. Anno di studi 1966-67* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1970), 161-82; Antonietta Bufano, "Il canto XIX dell'*Inferno*," *Critica letteraria* 13 (1985),

211–32; Charles T. Davis, “Canto XIX: Simoniacs,” *Lectura Dantis “Inferno,”* ed. Allen Mandelbaum, Anthony Oldcorn, and Charles Ross (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 262–74; Giovanni Fallani, “Il canto dei simoniaci,” *Poesia e teologia nella Divina commedia*, vol. 1 (Milan: Marzorati, 1959), 77–93; Mark Musa, *Advent at the Gates: Dante’s “Comedy”* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974), 37–64; or Antonino Pagliaro, “Canto XIX,” *Lectura Dantis Scaligera: Inferno* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1967), 619–668. V. Stanley Benfell’s entries on “Simonists” and “Simony” in *The Dante Encyclopedia* (ed. Richard Lansing [New York: Garland, 2000], 781–82) likewise make no mention of the latter phase, nor does Giovanni Fallani’s entry, “Simonia e simoniaci,” in the *Enciclopedia dantesca* (5 vols. [Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1984], 4:260–62). Others make categorical or overly reductive statements about the *contrappasso* that do not match the facts. Anna Granville Hatcher and Mark Musa argue that “in this word [*zanche*], recalling the up-raised legs of Nicholas, is epitomized the *contrappasso* of the simonist (who had attempted to reverse the sacred order of things)” (“Lucifer’s Legs,” *PMLA* 79 [1964]: 198). Gianluigi Berardi limits his summary of *la pena* to the following: “Stanno arrovesciati dentro ogni buca da cui emergono soltanto le gambe fino al polpaccio; le piante dei loro piedi sono bruciate dal fuoco così che i miseri devono scalcciare all’impazzata” (“Dante, *Inferno* XIX,” *Letteratura e critica: Studi in onore di Natalino Sapegno*, ed. Walter Binni et al., 2nd vol. [Rome: Bulzoni, 1975], 96). Finally, for Ronald B. Herzman and William A. Stephany, “the *contrappasso* of the entire canto” consists of “the inversion of the popes who have turned the sacramental system of the church upside down” (“‘O miseri seguaci’: Sacramental Inversion in *Inferno* XIX,” *Dante Studies* 96 [1978]: 51).

4. Only one other punishment similarly proceeds by phases: that of the suicides, who first germinate as plants and subsequently are subject to the pain inflicted upon them by the feeding harpies. Unlike the simonists, however, the punishment of the suicides does not involve spatial relocation or a change in shape of the punished soul from one phase to the other. Like other sinners, the suicides will recover their bodies at the time of the Last Judgment, but with the unique difference that they will not wear them again; rather, they will hang from the bushes that have sprouted from their souls.

5. The color of the stone, *livido*, a grayish-black, compares to other colors in *Inferno* that oscillate between shades, such as *perso*, a sort of blackish purple, the color of the air, or the “tra bianca e gialla” of Satan’s face (*Inf.* 34.43). On these coloristic effects see Fredi Chiappelli, “Il colore della menzogna nelle scenografie dell’*Inferno*,” *Lectura Dantis* 6 (1990): 5.

6. Dante uses the noun *foro* as a gathering place or place of exchange twice in *Paradiso*: “Quell’altro fiammeggiare esce del riso / di Grazian, che l’uno e l’altro foro / aiutò sì che piace in paradiso” (10.103–05); “E fia prefetto nel foro divino / allora tal, che palese e coverto / non anderà con lui per un cammino” (30.142–44).

7. Susan Noakes, “Dino Compagni and the Vow in San Giovanni: *Inferno* XIX, 16–21,” *Dante Studies* 86 (1968): 41–63. This essay has not received the attention it deserves. Even though Noakes’s interpretation of the six lines hangs by a rather thin thread, she supplies a number of invaluable insights along the way, making for a rewarding reading. On the nature of the baptistery structures, see Rocca, “Dei quattro pozzetti dell’antico battistero di San Giovanni in Firenze e dei versi di Dante che ad essi si riferiscono,” *Rendiconti del R. Istituto Lombardo di Scienze e Lettere*, 2nd ser., 51 (1919): 454–69, and Giuseppe Vandelli, “I ‘fori’ del ‘bel San Giovanni,’” *Studi Danteschi* 15 (1931): 55–66. On the origins of the *questo/questi* problem, see John A. Scott, “The Rock of Peter and *Inferno* XIX,” *Romance Philology* 23 (1970): 462–79.

8. Dante Della Terza, “XIX,” in *Dante’s “Divine Comedy.” Introductory Readings I: “Inferno,”* ed. Tibor Wlassics, *Lectura Dantis* 6: Supplement (1990): 252.

9. Leo Spitzer, “Two Dante Notes,” *The Romanic Review* 34 (1943): 254–55. John A. Scott agreed with Spitzer, although he rejected Spitzer’s overall conclusions: “*questo* . . . is a *figura* that awaits fulfillment, the necessary link, which the poet goes on to establish with his description of the *contrappasso* (22–30) and his denunciation of the *avarizia* that is assassinating humanity (90–117).” Scott, “The Rock of Peter and *Inferno*, XIX,” 479).

10. Della Terza, “XIX,” 253.

11. See Mark Musa, “E questo sia suggel ch’ogn’uomo sganni (*Inferno* XIX, 21),” *Italica* 41 (1964): 134–38.

12. While I take Giuseppe Mazzotta's point that "the text in itself, as if it were a formal self-enclosed universe or a self-sufficient monad, is a pure illusion" ("Why Did Dante Write the *Comedy*? Why and How Do We Read It? The Poet and the Critics," *Dante Now: Current Trends in Dante Studies*, ed. Theodore J. Cachey Jr. [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995], 69), it is nevertheless Dante's illusion, and it is one we need to take into account when reading the *Commedia*. While there can be no doubt that the poem condenses an immense knowledge, Dante offers the poem to his readers independent of his library, with no requirement that they go there.

13. Dante gives a first signal of this theme in the hyperbaton on line 14, "piena la pietra livida di fori," in which he drives the adjective *piena* apart from its complement, *di fori*, by the insertion of the words *la pietra livida*. The phrase *piena di fori* becomes the container for *la pietra livida*, in itself an ironic inversion since it is the stone that contains the holes and not vice versa.

14. Dante says "al grosso," taken by some to mean the calves, by others the thighs, which would explain the visibility of the *giunte*, the knee joints. Charles Singleton insists that the legs are visible only to the calves, and that the movement of the *giunte* is simply to be inferred. See "Inferno XIX: 'O Simon Mago!'" *MLN* 80 (1965): 92–99.

15. Pagliaro, "Canto XIX," 636, who also advances the theory, generally accepted, that the souls are upside-down because they had focused too intently on earthly goods rather than spiritual ones.

16. See, for example, Herzman and Stephany, "'O miseri seguaci': Sacramental Inversion in *Inferno* XIX," 40–41, and Berardi, "Dante, *Inferno* XIX," 109–10.

17. Moreover, as readers of this canto have repeatedly noted, the pope's inverted position foreshadows the position assumed by the avaricious popes in *Purgatorio* 19, where Adrian V explains their punishment: "Sì come l'occhio nostro non s'aderse / in alto, fisso a le cose terrene, / così giustizia qui a terra il merse" (118–20).

18. The identification of the sinners' legs with Lucifer's came first from Hatcher and Musa, "Lucifer's Legs." They made the association through the noun *zanca*, which they read as pejorative. They may have been wrong about this; see Ernest N. Kaulbach, S.S., "*Inferno* XIX, 45: The 'Zanca' of Temporal Power," *Dante Studies* 86 (1968): 127–35, who answered Singleton's call that "We need to know far more about *zanca* and its use in Dante's time than we actually do." That observation came on p. 96 of Singleton's lively reply to Granville and Musa ("Lucifer's Legs,"), "*Inferno* XIX: 'O Simon Mago!'" Hatcher and Musa then answered Singleton the following year: "Lucifer's Legs, Again," *MLN* 81 (1966): 88–91. David Nolan also explicitly contests the identification of the simonists' legs with Lucifer's, suggesting instead the Judas parallelism ("*Inferno* XIX," *Dante Commentaries: Eight Studies of the 'Divine Comedy'*, ed. David Nolan [Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1977], 32). To the association of the simonists with Satan through the noun *zanca* one might reply by noting that the legs stick out from the *bocca* of the hole (*Inf.* 19.22), reinforcing the analogy with Judas.

19. Virgil points out to Dante that Farinata is visible "dalla cintola in su" (*Inf.* 10.33), whereas Cavalcante appears only "infino al mento" (*Inf.* 10.53).

20. Petrocchi, "La prosapia del mago Simone," 266.

21. Della Terza, "XIX," 249.

22. *ST II-II*, q. 100, a. 1. I cite from the online *Summa* translated by the fathers of the English Dominican Province (1920), published at [www.newadvent.org/summa](http://www.newadvent.org/summa).

23. Dante's use of *arte* in reference to the works of God occurs in two other places in *Inferno*, 11.100 and 14.6. The word *arte* appears in rhyme nine times in the first *cantica*, always with *parte* and then with a variety of third rhyme words: *diparte* (4.75), *sparte* (9.118, 14.2); *parte* (10.49); *carte* (11.102), *sarte* (21.14; 27.81), *Marte* (31.51), and of course *comparte* in the canto of the simonists.

24. See, for example, Fallani, "Simonia e simoniaci," 261.

25. See *The Comedy of Dante Alighieri the Florentine. Cantica I. Hell (L'Inferno)*, trans. Dorothy L. Sayers (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), 190; and *The Divine Comedy*, trans. Laurence Binyon, in *The Portable Dante*, ed. Paolo Milano (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 102. Nor does one get much help on this point from other readers. Pagliaro, for example, finesses the question by saying that "Niccolò III scivolerà, anzi sarà tratto giù e si appiattirà lungo le fessure della pietra" (651).

26. "Il mulo trasse, e diell un calcio tale che l'uccise." *Il Novellino*, ed. Cesare Segre (Turin: Einaudi, 1976), 140. In Segre's edition the story bears the number 94, whereas in the 1612 first edition of the *Crusca* it is cited as story 91.

27. Richard Kenneth Emmerson and Ronald B. Herzman, "Antichrist, Simon Magus, and Dante's 'Inferno' XIX," *Traditio* 36 (1980): 373–98. The essay borrows in part from the earlier essay by Herzman and Stephany, "'O miseri seguaci': Sacramental Inversion in *Inferno* XIX."

28. See Petrocchi, "La prosapia del mago Simone," 255–69, for details about this culture of simony.

29. Emmerson and Herzman, "Antichrist, Simon Magus, and Dante's 'Inferno' XIX," 397. David Nolan offers a slightly different reading: "There is no question but that Dante represents these ecclesiastics as having mined gold and silver from the rock of the Church, indeed as having undermined the rock of Peter, and they are now punished by the reality of the honeycombed rock of Hell" (12).

30. Dante Alighieri, *La divina commedia. Inferno*, ed. Natalino Sapegno (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1976), 214n.

31. Della Terza, "XIX," 255.

32. The notion of the soul as coin may also be something of a punning allusion to one of Gregory the Great's remarks about simony, cited by Della Terza: "According to Gregory, only when simoniac corruption is 'compressa et radicibus amputata' will the Christian religion be bound to survive and prosper" ("XIX," 260n). By *compressa* the pope likely means suppressed or restrained, but the verb also connotes squeezing, hence Dante's joke.

33. See Philip Grierson, *The Coins of Medieval Europe* (London: Seaby, 1991), 109–10.

34. Examples include the enthroned Christ on the Venetian *grosso* in the mid-thirteenth century and the slightly later Sicilian *Carlino d'oro*, which shows the Annunciation. See Grierson, images 237 and C11.

35. Paul Renucci, "Le Chant XIX de l'*Enfer*," *Lecture dell' "Inferno"*, ed. Vittorio Vettori (Milan: Marzorati, 1963), 166.

36. Only Kenelm Foster comments on Nicholas's attitude, though without drawing attention to its irony: "But it is worth noting that it is not Dante who begins the judging and condemning. Nicholas' two speeches, the abrupt outburst of verses 52–57, and the longer speech beginning at verse 66, are full of sharp acrid moral comment—first, on Boniface VIII, verses 55–57 ('Se' tu sì tosto di quell' aver sazio' etc.), then on himself, verses 70–72 ('e veramente fui figliuol de l'orsa / cupido sì' etc.) and finally, and still more grimly, on Clement V, verses 82–84 (. . . 'verrà di più laida opra / . . . un pastor senza legge . . .'). Indeed Nicholas, in his rather base way, seems to be more preoccupied with morality than any of the other major self-exposers in the *Inferno*, except perhaps Vanni Fucci" ("The Canto of the Damned Popes, *Inferno* XIX," *The Two Dantes and Other Studies* [London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1977], 93). Foster's analysis of Nicholas (93–96) is perhaps the best of any to date.

37. On this point, see Chiappelli, "Il colore della menzogna."

38. Paul Renucci accuses Nicholas of pride: "De ces phrases et de son apostrophe au pseudo-Boniface VIII se dégagent les grandes lignes d'un portrait moral: dans sa dure rancœur de damné il entre encore un vestige d'orgueil qui, vite rabattu par le sens de sa condition présente, se résout en un trait d'auto-ironie presque gouailleuse avant de s'évanouir" ("Le Chant XIX de l'*Enfer*," 166–67).

39. Herzman and Stephany, "'O miseri seguaci': Sacramental Inversion in *Inferno* XIX," 39.

40. Chiappelli, "Il colore della menzogna," 22.

# The Book of Questions: Prayer and Poetry

GIUSEPPE MAZZOTTA

The importance of prayer in the unfolding of the *Divine Comedy* is equaled only by its relative neglect by scholars. There has been some attention episodically paid to, say, the Lord's prayer in *Purgatorio* 11 and a great deal of mainly philological analysis to the Prayer to the Virgin in *Paradiso* 33 and its echoes of St. Bernard's Marian meditations.<sup>1</sup> Even Dante's prayers to the muse Calliope and the god of poetry Apollo have received proper scholarly scrutiny. But there has been no effort to investigate and much less to provide a plausible conceptual framework for this central aspect of the poem.<sup>2</sup> This paper intends to fill the lacuna.

My remarks rest on two premises. The first is that religious prayer and the act of praying, which the poem calls variously "preghiera," "orazione," "supplica," "preghi," and which entails invocations, intercessions, petitions, begging, and the like, are fundamentally acts positing the belief in the power of the word. The second premise, which flanks the first, is that prayers are "questions" (in the sense of demands, appeals or inquiries) that the penitents in Purgatory, the blessed in Paradise, and the poet himself, *qua* poet, ask of God. The sense of how these questions can be understood in part emerges from the use Aquinas makes of what amounts to the architectural block of his thought.

From a formal standpoint, the *Summa theologiae* and the *Quaestiones disputatae*, are engaged in analytical investigations of philosophical/theological problems, and the investigations are systematically conducted through the alternation of questions and answers. Aquinas's mode suggests that "questions" are constitutive of his quest for philosophical truth. Dante's text, especially *Paradiso*, also stages a sequence of questions,

responses, doubts, and further questions, and the sequence encapsulates several levels of Dante's poetic journey. Far from being abstract argumentative tropes, his questions are primarily rooted in the figurations of a concrete love-experience binding Dante and Beatrice in an inter-subjective dialogue that blurs the boundaries between them. Their love makes possible their conversation. And because all the questions Dante poses ultimately summon up God's being, his questions are characterized by existential, ethical, and metaphysical resonances. In this sense, prayers constitute an essential frame of thought throughout the *Divine Comedy*. Indeed, the poem cannot be properly understood without taking into account this interrogative mode, this pilgrim's way to ponder and get a grip on the deeply spiritual (i.e., human) problems he confronts.

The "interrogative" mode gives a hint of the affinity and divergence between prayer and poetry, and this paper will shed light on Dante's awareness of that problematical relationship. What must be stressed for now is that so important and all-encompassing is the question of prayer in the poem that it cannot be reduced to the status of a mere theme, of one of the sundry fragmentary topics, such as, say, law, medicine, mythology, politics, the arts and sciences, and so forth, that punctuate the poem and stamp on it its encyclopedic character. The *Divine Comedy* can be called a "book of prayers," and the question of prayer as much as the question of poetry are of a piece with the massive references to the liturgical, sacred drama, sacred songs (psalms and hymns) performed in the poem, and to the nature of poetic language.<sup>3</sup>

If prayer plays such a central role that it cannot be treated reductively as another thematic articulation and not even as a "perspective" on life (a visual metaphor that implies a limited horizon), then what exactly is it? Put in the starkest terms possible, prayer is a fundamental language-experience that shapes the poet's imagination, indeed it is one in which his moral and spiritual ascent are rooted. The fundamental role it plays notwithstanding, prayer is not itself the ground of the poem. Because love is both the poem's spiritual force and center of gravity and God as love is the power that keeps the world from falling apart,<sup>4</sup> prayers are inconceivable without a sustaining love. Indeed, they come forth primarily as expressions of the poem's total love-discourse. As such, they acquire the status of the language of the desire that impels Dante, the pilgrim of love, to journey in time, against time, and beyond time, a journey that takes him down and up the map of the cosmos and triggers his becoming other



than what his political call wished to make of him. In this sense, prayer encompasses the movement of the poem, from beginning to end, the way a house (to use an image of familiarity for which the homeless pilgrim/poet longs) envelops its occupant.

Textual examples of the variety of prayers and indirect references to them abound in the poem: the first words the pilgrim speaks in Hell, as he acknowledges the depth of the abjection to which he has sunk, are the words of a prayer, Psalm 50, “*Miserere di me, quel che tu sia*” (*Inf.* 1.65).<sup>5</sup> The pilgrim’s last words are a prayer to God that he grant him a glimmer of his light: “O somma luce che tanto ti levi / . . . ripresta un poco di quel che parevi, / e fa la lingua mia tanto possente, / ch’una favilla sol de la tua gloria / possa lasciare a la futura gente” (*Par.* 33.67–72).<sup>6</sup> In between, we hear prayers/songs, such as the “*Salve, Regina*” (*Purg.* 7.82); liturgical hymns in honor of the Cross (*Inf.* 34.1); lauds at vespers, matins, and nones, “*Te lucis ante*” (*Purg.* 8.13); the “*Te Deum*” (*Purg.* 9.140); the “*Ave*” of the Annunciation-event (*Purg.* 10.40); the Lord’s Prayer (*Purg.* 11.1 ff.); scenes of the penitents in Purgatory, whose one prayer is that others should pray that their way of blessedness be quickened (*Purg.* 6.25–26), which alternate with reflections on whether or not a prayer can ever hope to bend the decree of heaven (*Purg.* 15.28); displays of the power of Pope Gregory I as he prayed to recall Trajan to life and convert him to Christianity (*Par.* 20.44–117); at the same time, occasional responses of alleluia are heard just as the singing of psalms, such as “*In exitu Israel de Aegypto*” (*Purg.* 2.46).

It is, no doubt, a sign of how deeply Dante has weighed the act of prayer if in *Paradiso* 32 his final guide, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, picks up the thread that had introduced the pilgrim’s descent. As Bernard points out the Hebrew women sitting in the theater of the New Jerusalem—Rachel, Sarah, Rebecca, Judith—he names Ruth by a circumlocution. He identifies her as the mother of King David. David, in turn, is referred to as “the singer” who, in grief for his sin, cried “*Miserere mei*” (*Par.* 32.12). Read in its entirety, one discovers the psalm’s lament about the mother: “Behold, I was conceived in iniquities; and in sins did my mother conceive me” (Psalms 50:7), and the reference may account for Dante’s discreet evasiveness about Ruth. More poignantly, by the reference the text symmetrically circles back to the very words the pilgrim “cried out” at the beginning of his adventure. By the symmetry the poet marks his consciousness of the great distance he has traveled. An act of witnessing

also occurs: the words of the prayer acknowledge the dejection of the figure who says “I”—“*Miserere mei*”—and establish a bridge from Hell to Heaven. The prayer, in reality, functions as a bridge: the pilgrim has passed over that bridge, which, like a thread guiding out of the labyrinth, has led him into the presence of the Virgin Mary’s majesty.

The poem pulsates with this language of spiritual awareness, and the language measures the steps of the pilgrim’s ascent. The ascetic repertory ranges from prayers of intercession to songs of gratitude and praise to devotional invocations to God’s mercy, and even to a hagiographical account of a character, Bonconte of Montefeltro, who saves his soul at the last moment of his life by invoking the name of Mary (*Purg.* 5.101). Yet this list does not exhaust the repository of prayers. Dante deploys an array of what could be called pagan prayers, such as invocations to the muses, to Calliope, and to Apollo. They color the narrative of, say, Arnaut Daniel, who appeals to the pilgrim that he may be remembered: “*Ara vos prec*” (*Purg.* 26.145–47).<sup>7</sup> One could argue that in these conversational modes one could discover the decay of the energy and vitality animating religious prayers. In reality, however, these modes renew the prayer-consciousness. At any rate, they belong to the texture of ordinary language and govern the interaction between, for instance, Francesca and the pilgrim<sup>8</sup>.

The recurrence of these forms of prayer begs the question: How are religious prayer and the rhetoric of praying as secular discourse (or poetic invocations) bound together in the poem? Is Dante suggesting that the poem enjoys a privileged or even a transgressive status because it embraces both sacred and secular rhetoric? Transgression is, at least on the face of it, hardly the case. It suffices that we recall a canonical hymn, such as the “*Dies Irae*,” which refers in the same breath to the witness borne by both David and the Sybil. Is Dante treading doctrinally dangerous grounds by opening himself up and utilizing at the same time classical and biblical strands of the tradition? These questions logically beg the more fundamental question: What does the pilgrim or the penitents do when they engage in religious prayers?

Let me make a preliminary suggestion. The questions voiced by poetry and by prayer are joined together by the fact that they both bring into language the relationship human beings entertain with themselves, with history, and with their Maker. It can be added that the distinction between

them emerges clearly as a contrast between two different views of language. To grasp with some precision how Dante develops his response to these questions, I will turn to the analysis of some texts.

Dante thematizes the concern with the origin and implications of prayer in two early texts, the *De vulgari eloquentia* and his autobiographical narrative, *Vita Nuova*. Even prior to writing either work he was most likely familiar with the founding text of Italian literary history that makes the relation between prayer and poetry its very subject matter, St. Francis' "*Laudes creaturarum*," known in English as "The Canticle of the Creatures" or "Canticle of Brother Sun." Written in 1224, this text affirms Francis's personal theology of glorification of life and death, of glorification of the Creator by, through, and on account of all entities of creation—sun and moon, the four elements (fire, air, water, and earth) and "sister" death herself:

Altissimu, onnipotente bon Signore,  
Tue so' le laude, la Gloria e l'honore et onne  
benedictione. Ad Te solo, Altissimo, se konfano  
et nullu homo ene dignu te mentovare.  
Laudato sie, mi' Signore cum tucte le Tue creature,  
spetialmente messer lo frate Sole,  
lo qual' è iorno, et allumini noi per lui.  
Et ellu è bellu e radiante cum grande splendore:  
de Te, Altissimo, porta significazione.  
Laudato si', mi' Signore, per sora Luna e le stelle: . . .  
Laudato si', mi' Signore, per sora nostra Matre Terra  
la quale ne sustenta et governa,  
et produce diversi fructi con coloriti fior et herba.  
Laudato si', mi' Signore, per quelli che perdonano per lo  
Tuo amore . . .  
Laudato si', mi' Signore, per sora nostra Morte corporale,  
da la quale nullu homo vivente pò skappare: . . .  
Laudate et benedicite mi' Signore et rengratiate  
e serviateli cum grande humilitate.<sup>9</sup>

Written in Francis's native Umbrian dialect, a choice meant to signal a poor, humble style of a daily, familiar use, the poem belongs to the genre of the Umbrian *lauda*, a song of praise and thanksgiving as well as a term for the time's musical theater. In this spectacle of creation, marked by repetitions ("Laudato si', mi' Signore," "Altissimo," "per" (in the polysemous sense of "by," "for," and "through")) that act like musical refrains,

the actors are the foundations of nature—the sun, the moon, the four natural elements, and death herself. Nothing at first distinguishes human beings ontologically from the natural entities such as the wind and the fire. They all acknowledge God and rise up toward the heights of the universe, whence the Lord beholds equally all his creatures, mutually involved and entwined, and yet each is individualized, in the splendor of the sunlight. One distinctive trait, however, sets apart human beings from the things of nature: human beings know and fear the black depths of spiritual death. But death does not necessarily become the hellish enclosure of the damned. For Francis, the human consciousness of finitude is the route through which human beings open up to a spiritual transcendence.

In spite of the uniqueness of human beings within the economy of creation no real hierarchy of value is established. The poem stages a reflection on the distant and the near, the high and the low (God is superlatively the “*Altissimo*” and man is the “humble” one, capable of crawling on the earth). But nothing remains here of the conventional neo-Platonic analogy between microcosm and macrocosm. In reality, as happens in a theater, all perspectives are reversed: the “*Altissimo*” looks down on all entities, and human beings in their humility can only look up. What dismantles any idea of a hierarchy of fixed values is the recognition of the bonds of familiarity among all creatures. *Friar* Francis gets it right: he evokes Brother Sun, Sister Moon, Sister Water, Brother Fire, the paradoxical formula of Sister-Mother Earth, Sister Death, Brother Wind and Air. Creation is literally a Franciscan convent, our common familiar home and the theater of God’s glory.

The notion of familiarity as a mode of perception of life is not, of course, only a Franciscan insight. We may recall a philosopher, Aristotle, who maintains that “. . . by starting from the inadequately known but familiar to us we can learn to know what is intrinsically intelligible, using what we do know to guide us. . . .”<sup>10</sup> Unlike Aristotle, Francis is not interested in reaching the land of pure understanding. In his optics, the notion of familiarity, which stretches from his common language to the discovery of an intimacy between the stars and our own death (an intimacy marked by the familiar “*Tu*” form of address), reveals a deeper truth: there is no room for an illusory objective boundary or estrangement between the distant and the unfamiliar and the close at hand. The close at hand—one’s own self—is both familiar and terribly mysterious. By the

same token, just as Francis challenges the value of rigid perspectives as if they engendered distortions of knowledge, so does he erase the possibility of an intrinsic difference between poetry and prayer. His “Canticle” is a prayer, and the prayer here comes forth as what linguists call a “language-event,” an occurrence in which the words of praising and thanking are themselves literally the things they mean and not ciphers or representations of them. Like promises, invectives, oaths, curses, blessings, and even laws, prayers are invested with the power to create reality. In this sense, the prayer is indistinguishable from the love poetry Francis writes for the whole of creation.

There can be little doubt, as will be shown further on, that Dante took to heart Francis’ radical understanding of the incantatory power of language, convergent religious/esthetic phenomena, and his desire to bind together all immanent sacramental manifestations of the divine and natural orders. In the *Divine Comedy*, however, the link between prayer and the “poetic” is kept open, as if Dante were circumspect about poetic language’s possible magic claims. The term defining St. Bernard’s prayer is *orazione* (*Par.* 32.151). The same term designates Ulysses’ rhetorical exercise (*Inf.* 26.122). The orator and the orant are, however, at cross-purposes. For a drastic difference separates the two linguistic experiences: the words of Ulysses, the classical weaver of fictions and empty rhetorical promises, make all reality vanish at the very moment when it promises access to knowledge and virtue. Bernard’s words go beyond both himself and themselves. He is a beggar of love, who begs for the pilgrim’s sake that he may experience the vision of God. The deployment of the very term *orazione* for two opposed experiences hints that in order to understand language—*intelligere*—we must “*intus legere*.”<sup>11</sup>

That Dante himself thought long and hard about the relation between poetry and prayer that Francis has posited in his own inimitable way comes to the light in two early texts I mentioned and which he wrote respectively during and before his exile from Florence (1302). The *De vulgari eloquentia*, written around 1303, discusses the geography of European languages, their origins, the causes for their diversity, and it sets rules for the emerging Italian language. In the process of wondering why human beings—not the angels, who communicate intuitively and not the animals—have received the gift of words from God, Dante raises the question of who spoke first in the Garden of Eden (*DVE* 1.4.3–4). He goes on to say that scripture records Eve’s response to the devil’s seduction

and he omits mentioning that, in reality, the scriptural text assigns to Adam the poietic act of naming all the animals of the earth (Gen. 2:19–20). The omission is meant to highlight Dante's genuine concern: Adam spoke first and his first word was "El," the monosyllabic Hebrew name of God, which was spoken, so we are told, as a question or an answer: "El, vel per modum interrogationis, vel per modum responsionis."<sup>12</sup> The foundational origin of language thus emerges as an unmistakably *theological* question—the uttering of the name of God. Its primordial expression in Adam's encounter with the *logos*, in his fresh consciousness of his being, is a prayer, a turning to God, and the prayer marks the beginning of a conversation between man and God. Clearly, the birth of language is constitutively dialogical (and not a solipsistic, self-enclosed monologue), and the dialogue casts it as the locus of the transcendent encounter, as the bridge between the creator and his creature. An aura of ambiguity envelops this beginning. Dante envelops it into an enigmatic silence: we do not know what triggered Adam's utterance of "El." No doubt, the silence serves as a way of isolating the name of God from all concerns, as if there were no need to wonder about a context within which "El" emerged. Yet, it is not unsuitable for us to puzzle over what Adam's actual question may have been or to what he was responding. It is likely that for Dante there was no difference between the question and the response. They open up a conversation, and in this conversation what matters is that Adam may have asked "Why did you create me?" or, as one infers given the contextual reference to Eve's seduction, "Why do you love me?"

What the *De vulgari eloquentia* leaves teasingly unexplored and elliptical is given full treatment in Dante's earlier *Vita Nuova* (1294), which relates the existential predicament of the poet as a young lover. Let me briefly frame the story: it recounts Dante's own partial autobiographical portrait starting with his meeting Beatrice when he was in his ninth year, of his seeing her again nine years later and falling in love with her. From the start the lover is so self-absorbed that he knows nothing of Beatrice, nothing of love's essence or, for that matter, of who he is himself. As a route to the poet's self, the whole narrative ponders the many-sided and ancient question of the nature of love and is crystallized in the most fundamental perplexity in which human beings are persistently caught: does she love me? Dante understands this implicit question as the complacent flip-side of a more difficult one: whom do I really love other than my own self? Laden with these puzzles, the *Vita Nuova* features the distance, real or

imagined, of the beloved, the enigma of her silences, the equivocations of the signs of love or even the anguish the lover feels when Beatrice refuses him her greetings as well as the painful awareness he will eventually experience in *Purgatory* (30–31) that in the eyes of the beloved the lover will always appear guilty.<sup>13</sup>

In the middle of this intricate phenomenology of love and of the language of love Dante devises a “new style” of writing—the style of the lauda (used earlier by overtly religious poets, such as Guittone d’Arezzo and the Franciscan Iacopone da Todi)—whereby he seeks to invest his poetry with the quality of a spiritual, sacred song or prayer to celebrate the uniqueness of his beloved and of his being trusted by her. Nonetheless, Dante cannot escape the temptation of solipsism, with which the autobiography had started, and which is heightened by Beatrice’s death. The love story is not actually over at her death. Love needs bodies, but, if it is real, it survives the death of the body. From *Purgatory* 30 to *Paradiso* 30, from the time the two lovers meet in the Garden of Eden to the moment when she leaves him at the edge of the Mystical Rose, Dante in effect rewrites the *Vita Nuova* as he wished it had been the first time around, and he does so without lapsing into nostalgia. He undertakes now to explore the infinite possibilities of an amorous discourse or of what traditionally are called “questions of love,” conducted by a Beatrice who had been enigmatically silent in life. Their questions and answers are part of their heavenly bliss: they open up and anchor their philosophical abstractions to the depths of the poet’s personal, existential engagement.

These preliminary remarks on the two early texts enable us to explore the sense of the radically new turn Dante will take in writing the *Divine Comedy*. The stakes are now high, and they concern nothing less than discovering the source and the secret of the love that holds the world together, which a prayer presupposes and tests. Socrates, Plato, and all metaphysicians are masters at asking questions about essences and values: What is love? What is language? What is death? Their questions determine the very possibility of their philosophical dialogues, but they never come close to considering concrete, historical incarnations of love, of language, beauty, and death, and what they mean to real, historical characters. By contrast, through his questions Dante wishes to find his place in the world *and* in the heart of all things. Behind each question there is usually a response, or the promise of one, and beyond them he glimpses the presence of the divinity. In this sense any genuine question can only

be a prayer. Thus the question of prayer leads him to engage simple but far-reaching perplexities: What do we actually do when we pray? What do we hear? What, if anything, happens to us as a consequence of praying?

To probe further into the phenomenology of prayer, I submit that the poem identifies and privileges three different models, three different but complementary, authoritative paradigms of prayer. In *Paradiso* 32, right after acknowledging David's "*Miserere mei*" and right before St. Bernard intones his prayer to the Virgin (a dramatic movement from the depths to the highest that encapsulates the dynamics of the Christian *sublime*), Dante mentions the names of Augustine, Francis, and Benedict (35). Why these three names? The choice is legitimate: each of them inaugurated fundamental ways of transforming our common perception of the world. Each of them wrote a *regula* for the religious order he founded. And each of them founded the rule on specific practices of prayer: Augustine's prayer as the access to the interiority of the self (the way of the heart); Francis's sense of prayer as the love-discourse of material creation and at the same time the transvaluation of the world; and Benedict's prayer as the ascetic daily journey of a visionary monk who dreamed the possible reconstruction of the world via the experience of contemplation. Together, the three modes stand for the movement of the mind *intra nos*, *extra nos*, and *super nos*, to say it in the language of Bonaventure's threefold division of the mind's itinerary into God.

The Augustinian model of prayer, largely derived from the Psalms, is tied, as any reader of the *Confessions* knows, to the analysis of one's own internalized subjectivity as well as to the recognition of the need to turn around one's life. The Augustinian notion is deployed right at the opening of the poem. Let me recall the dramatic situation of the prologue scene. The pilgrim is displaced out of any familiar context. He finds himself in a twilight world where all knowledge is shadowy and the shadows lead him to mistake one thing for another.<sup>14</sup> In this strange and savage land, he knows neither his way about nor what is to be done. Because three beasts—a leopard, a lion, and a she-wolf—raging with hunger lunge forward against him, Dante provisionally loses all hope of finding his way. The *Divine Comedy*, thus, has a sort of a potentially tragic beginning, with its emphasis on danger and possible threat of drowning. All of a sudden, an unidentified, silent shape appears, or, as the poet writes, "was offered to me": "*mi si fu offerta*" (*Inf.* 1.62). This apparition, for all its mystery, is an offering or a gift, and whenever we are confronted with a gift we



ask who gives it to us. For the time being the poem leaves the question unasked. Dante addresses the shape he sees as if it were a conundrum or a chance occurrence, though he learns that the seemingly gratuitous apparition was prepared by three women, Mary, Lucy, and Beatrice: that is, he will find out that he was loved before he knew it and before he could actually claim that he deserved it. He cries out: "*Miserere di me, qual che tu sia / ombra od omo certo*" (65–66): "Have pity on me whatever you are, shade or living man."

This initial phrase adapts and alludes to the opening words of Psalm 50 ("Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing mercy"). It is a psalm, as hinted earlier, in which David confesses his transgressions, the evil he has committed through his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, the Hittite Uriah (2 Sam. 11:2). The words the pilgrim utters while he is in the grip of a paralyzing fear, in effect, first of all, "read" him in a radical hermeneutical sense—interpret him to himself and unveil to him the reality of his existential predicament. We can say, with Roland Barthes, that to speak means to be spoken. And as in Augustine's confessional autobiography, here too, the primary impulse and effect of prayer is self-knowledge, which is the precondition of knowledge of others and knowledge of God. This is not, however, simply the Socratic exercise of the examined life. The pilgrim, by the prayer, comes to know himself in the concreteness of his circumstances: he comes to know that he needs to alter the course he was sailing to escape from the sea into which he was sinking. The shade he addresses is that of the poet Vergil, who will guide his troubled disciple through increasing degrees of evil so that, later, he can reach the light of Purgatory.

The self-knowledge dawning on the pilgrim casts the prayer as a language-event, as a language that is not a representation or a simulacrum but reality itself and in which he locates the roots of his salvation. Above all, on account of the "*Miserere* prayer, the pilgrim denudes himself and gets a sense of himself that is completely at odds with the fictions of the self—or the image of the merciful lady—that fascinated him when writing his *Vita Nuova*. But prayer is invested with other crucial senses. The pilgrim's prayer is manifestly a quotation: he repeats the words of King David, and by repeating them he is speaking through someone else's language. The spoken words stage the presence of two selves in one. Yet, by uttering words which are not his and which pre-exist him, he gives up

his illusory conviction in a fixed self-identity, his sovereignty or self-possession, and acknowledges his own self as an object of somebody else's mercy. More than that, the prayer, which in appearance is a monologue, comes forth as a genuine dialogue in that he is finally listening to himself speaking as if he were another, or, if one wishes, he allows somebody else's words to reach and touch him. In this sense, they force him to understand that maybe someone else is listening to his cry and that he can become what he truly is by giving up the illusion of autonomy of self.

The Franciscan paradigm of prayer, on the other hand, is explicitly staged in the Lord's Prayer:

“O Padre nostro, che ne' cieli stai,  
non circoscritto, ma per più amore  
ch'ai primi effetti di là sù tu hai,  
laudato sia 'l tuo nome e 'l tuo valore  
da ogni creatura, com'è degno  
di render grazie al tuo dolce vapore.

Vegna ver' noi la pace del tuo regno,  
ché noi ad essa non potem da noi,  
s'ella non vien, con tutto nostro ingegno.

Come del suo voler li angeli tuoi  
fan sacrificio a te, cantando *osanna*,  
così facciano li uomini de' suoi.

Dà oggi a noi la cotidiana manna,  
sanza la qual per questo aspro deserto  
a retro va chi più di gir s'affanna.

E come noi lo mal ch'avem sofferto  
perdoniamo a ciascuno, e tu perdona  
benigno, e non guardar lo nostro merto.

Nostra virtù che di legger s'adona,  
non spermentar con l'antico avversaro,  
ma libera da lui che sì la sprona.

Quest' ultima preghiera, signor caro,  
già mai si fa per noi, ché non bisogna,  
ma per color che dietro a noi restaro.'

Così a sé e noi buona ramogna  
quell' ombre orando . . .”

(*Purg.* 11.1–26)<sup>15</sup>

In the *Compendium theologiae* (written around 1273) Aquinas, under the heading of “Hope,” reflects on the importance of saying “Our Father” and not “My Father.” The reason, he adds, is the nature of God's love,

which is never private but common to all things that exist.<sup>16</sup> This notion of God's all-embracing love brings out the contours of the Franciscan paradigm of prayer, which will emerge in detail from an analysis of Dante's adaptation of the Lord's Prayer. To grasp what is meant by the phrase "Franciscan paradigm of prayer," I would like to turn to a detail about Francis's prayer practices alluded to by his biographers Thomas of Celano and St. Bonaventure, but related extensively in the *Fioretti* or *Little Flowers of St. Francis*.

As if to dramatize the dark night of the soul and the daily battles it wages, while at La Verna Francis would go to pray at night, sometimes in an abandoned church and more often kneeling at the edge of a precipice outside of his cell.<sup>17</sup> It is a dizzying tale about prayer as a spiritual adventure flanked by the possibility of falling into the gorge. The risk Francis ran conveys a tremendous question: What or who saves me? What is it that forces me to save my life or keeps me from throwing myself over? The answer is that God saved his life. Yet the prayers he recited under these circumstances enacted, as in a theater, a play of possibilities for this juggler of the Lord. No doubt, the experience was meant to remind him of Christ's being tempted in the desert to throw himself into the abyss. By not falling and mindful of that example, Francis grasped the central purpose of prayer: prayer freed him of the fear of falling and had the effect of delivering him from all fears.

Dante's "Lord's Prayer," told by the penitents for the sin of pride who are crawling on the ground as an exercise of humility, stands squarely within the framework of Franciscan spirituality. Rhetorically, it is an invocation or apostrophe to God as "*Our Father*," a detail recalling the Franciscan principle of the human family. Dante compiles the prayer as a paraphrase of the canonical Lord's Prayer: his version repeats most of the original text *verbatim*, but he adds a number of phrases that do not really jibe with the prayer's authorized formulas; rather, they amplify and bring out the intellectual content of Jesus's teaching.

How can we account for Dante's mixture of repetition and personal innovation in the prayer he crafts? No doubt, repetition appears to be an essential trait of any prayer as well as the practice of prayer over an extended period of time. Is repetition meant to be understood as a mode of suspension of time, as a sort of magic incantation? What exactly is "repetition?" The word, from *re-petere*, conveys the sense of an "asking

again,” of a renewed search and question, and, as such, it suggests, paradoxically, a creative exercise, akin to the very act of breathing for one’s life, and a renewal of one’s awareness that as a creature one depends on the Creator. This hidden but genuine sense of the word entails a consideration. Through it, the orant acknowledges existence in time as a quest undertaken in order to change the past into the future. The additions Dante inserts into the text interpret the prayer in terms of the souls’ *passage* from the earth, and thus they express his sense of prayer as the way to the encounter with God. One insertion evokes directly the Franciscan poem/prayer and casts it as the standpoint from which to measure Dante’s own theological/poetic achievement: the lines “laudato sia ’l tuo nome e ’l tuo valore / da ogni creatura” (*Purg.* 11.405), the praise of the name of God, deliberately send us back to the many praises in “Altissimu, onnipotente.” They are lines, I suggest, that Francis clearly derives from the opening of St. Augustine’s *Confessions*: “Great art thou, Lord, and greatly to be praised; great is thy power and thy wisdom is infinite. And man wants to praise you, man who is only a small portion of what you have created.”<sup>18</sup> The overlapping of the two voices serves a dramatic purpose: the Augustinian emphasis on prayer *intra nos* becomes the necessary presupposition to the communal prayer *extra nos* of Francis. At any rate, like Francis’s poem, Dante’s adaptation of the Lord’s Prayer, which appears in the context of the interplay of pride and humility, focuses primarily on the need to humble pride and to ask for forgiveness for others.

Two other glosses Dante adds shift the prayer’s concerns away from the horizon of time to that of space. The first addition states that God does not dwell in a particular place. He is “uncircumscribed,” infinite, and thus he cannot be localized. The proposition echoes the mystical, hermetic formula of God as “the infinite sphere whose center is everywhere and whose circumference nowhere.” The second addition grafts the story of Exodus on to the trunk of the Lord’s Prayer: it begs that, like the Jews in the wilderness, the penitents receive their daily manna. By evoking the desert as the space of prayer and of God’s grace, Dante casts the Lord’s prayer as the figuration of a journey, as the voice of the common desire to be elsewhere, of settling in the “peace of the kingdom,” the Heavenly Jerusalem. This sense of estrangement and exile or homelessness (a counterpoint to the familiarity of God’s world) places the orants in history, in the space and time of the quest, between the house of bondage and the expectation of the kingdom. In this betwixt and between

space the penitents, who are doubled to the ground under the burden of massive boulders, pray for deliverance (“libera da lui che sì . . .” (23). The prayer for liberation from evil echoes Francis’s understanding of the essence of praying. Like his experience of freedom on the steep cliffs of La Verna, where he teetered on the brink of death, the penitents ask for freedom and they equate it with the gift of forgiveness. We must ask what new meaning emerges from the link between the two metaphors of deliverance and pardon. Pardon is etymologically a gift and, substantively, a scandal. Taken together the two terms allow us to discern that any genuine new beginning in both the self and history, any hope of reconciliation that would free human beings from their bondage to the past is achievable not through an impossible erasure of the past but through the will to forgive and think anew.

I have so far described Dante’s adaptation of the Augustinian and Franciscan paradigms of prayer, in which the first is subsumed into the second. For Benedict, as for Augustine and Francis, the point of departure for prayer is the perception of a broken self and a broken world. Whereas the Franciscan vision places the aspirations of human beings within history, Benedict, who removed himself from his ambient time, sought the return of ascetic, contemplative ideals into the spiritual wasteland of sixth-century Europe. In his Rule, however, prayer constitutes no escape from the world. Actually, it functions as the means of re-constructing it from the ground up. This sublime aim, unavoidably enveloped by the aura of an impossible utopian desire, is carried out by Dante’s representation of Benedict and the Benedictine sense of contemplation in *Paradiso* 21 and 22.<sup>19</sup> Dante, by evoking the dimension of time, obliquely retrieves their commitment to the liturgy of the eight canonical hours, but he also emphasizes the paradox of monastic contemplation as work and as an authentic mode of production. We find the contemplatives housed in the planet Saturn, the mythical god of time, who like the contemplatives transforms the temporal into the eternal. They do so by cutting out a privileged time and space—a *tempus* and a *templum*—within which and from which the soul gazes and penetrates into the divine mysteries. For the contemplative vision is the supreme form of knowledge.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, the myth of Saturn tells a story that inverts the direction of the contemplative gaze: Saturn is the god who, dethroned, falls to the earth and on earth teaches mankind the art of agriculture or the cultivation of

the earth. The contrast between the ascent of the monks' gaze and the downfall of the god is, however, only apparent.

One phrase crystallizes Benedictine spirituality: "ora et labor"—pray and work—and the two activities, like the two words designating them, echo each other and belong to each other. *Labora*, in reality, contains in its syllables *ora*. By virtue of the echo, the formula means for Benedict, as hinted earlier, that prayer is work and work is prayer. They both designate and draw contemplation within the perimeter of what we call a *praxis*, a productive activity. This activity, which brings to fruition and reveals the force of contemplation, is meant to change the face of the earth by letting its hidden treasures come forth. For Benedict this form of spirituality—the caring for oneself and for the earth—(which Dante, like Francis before him, saw at Camaldoli) was the condition that would enable the cenobitic communities of Cassino to be at home with whatever they harvested from the soil. For a poet like Dante, the work of art, his *techne*, aspires to possessing, like prayer, a power to bend the general will and to become a saving force. This new understanding of the Benedictine contemplative focus is voiced in the poem by the Cistercian St. Bernard of Clairvaux in the prayer to the Virgin crowning the poem:

“Vergine Madre, figlia del tuo figlio,  
umile e alta, più che creatura,  
termine fisso d'eterno consiglio,  
tu se' colei che l'umana natura  
nobilitasti sì che il suo fattore  
non disdegnò di farsi sua fattura.

Nel ventre tuo si raccese l'amore  
per lo cui caldo ne l'eterna pace  
così è germinato questo fiore.

Qui se' a noi meridiana face  
di caritate, e giuso, intra ' mortali  
se' di speranza fontana vivace.

Donna, se' tanto grande e tanto vali,  
che qual vuol grazia e a te non ricorre,  
sua disianza vuol volar sanz' ali.

La tua benignità non pur soccorre  
a chi domanda, ma molte fiate  
liberamente al dimandar precorre.

In te misericordia, in te pietate,  
in te magnificenza, in te s'aduna  
quantunque in creatura è di bontate.

Or questi, che da l'infima lacuna  
de l'universo infin qui ha vedute  
le vite spiritali ad una ad una,  
supplica te, per grazia di virtute  
tanto, che possa con li occhi levarsi  
più alto verso l'ultima salute.

E io, che mai per mio veder non arsi  
più ch'io fo per lo suo, tutti miei prieghi  
ti porgo, e priego che non sieno scarsi,  
perché tu ogne nube li dislegghi  
di sua mortalità co' prieghi tuoi,  
sì che 'l sommo piacer li si dispieghi.

Ancor ti priego, regina, che puoi  
ciò che tu vuoi, che conservi sani,  
dopo tanto veder, li affetti suoi.

Vinca tua guardia i movimenti umani:  
vedi Beatrice con quanti beati  
per li miei prieghi ti chiudon le mani.”

(*Par.* 33.1–39).

“Virgin Mother, daughter of thy Son, humble and exalted more than any other creature, fixed goal of the eternal counsel, thou art she who didst so ennoble human nature that its Maker did not disdain to become its creature. In your womb was rekindled the love under whose warmth this flower in the eternal peace has thus enfolded. Here thou art for us the noonday torch of charity, and below among mortals thou art the living fount of hope. Lady, thou art so great and so availest, that whoso would have grace and has not recourse to thee, his desire seeks to fly without wings. Thy loving-kindness not only succors him who asks, but oftentimes freely foreruns the asking. In thee is mercy, in thee pity, in thee munificence, in thee is found whatever of goodness is in any creature. Now this man, who from the lowest pit of the universe even to here has seen one by one the spiritual lives, implores thee of thy grace for power such that he may be able with his eyes to rise still higher toward the last salvation. And I, who never for my own vision burned more than I do for his, proffer to thee all my prayers, and pray that they be not scant, that with thy prayers thou wouldst dispel for him every cloud of his mortality, so that the Supreme Pleasure may be disclosed to him. Further, I pray thee, Queen, who canst do whatsoever thou wilt, that thou preserve sound for him his affections after so great a vision. Let Thy protection vanquish human impulses. Behold Beatrice, with how many spirits, for my prayers clasping their hands to thee.”

The prayer to the Virgin places us at the limit and the limitlessness of the human: we reach the point where the human and the divine meet.<sup>21</sup> This is the point where Dante himself yields to the desire to be like Mary, to

break down the partition keeping him from the “vision” of God. We thus witness a central drama played out at the heart of *Paradiso* 33. In contrast to Mary, who is invested with the attribute of being “più che creatura” (2) and has reached a transhuman condition, Dante looks into the radical limits of the human, which is constituted by the partition inherent to the finitude of our ordinary human condition, to which Bernard refers as the fog of time and the feebleness of the human mind. Can Dante hope to cross the frontiers of the possible and go beyond the human—while still alive?

This final spiritual drama is acted out in the two discreet sections of *Paradiso* 33. In the first section devoted to the prayer, we come face to face, first of all, with a rhetorical structure that follows the parameters of a *laudarium* (a sequel of praises) directed at the Virgin Mother, and that recapitulates her decisive role in both the poem and in history. The prayer to her obliquely brings us back to the desolation at the beginning of the poem when Mary sets in motion the chain of women who will bring relief to the lost pilgrim. But Mary, by the reversal of Eve’s role, epitomizes the possible new beginning of history that was inaugurated by the Annunciation. How exactly does the event of the Annunciation shed light on the overall role of Mary? In *Purgatorio* 10, Dante casts her as the primary example of humility, as a woman of prayer, the “woman of the Word,” who listened to and pondered Gabriel’s announcement, and who, when summoned, answered: “Here I am, the servant of the Lord” (44; Luke 1:38). Eventually, at Cana, she urges the attendants at the wedding to listen to her son (*Purg.* 13.29). The representation of Mary in *Paradiso* 33 underlines and brings together the various dimensions of Mary as a way of celebrating her immense role in history. She is the bearer of the divine Word, the sign of a new ethics, and the figure who can dismantle all barriers between the human and the divine. In this sense, she stands at the meeting point of all imaginable contradictions and thus, like her son, she embodies a sacred locus: the two of them reveal that the sacred is constituted by the simultaneous presence of the human and the divine. In the prayer to Mary, this sacredness is expressed by Dante’s style, through the series of paradoxes with which she is addressed: she is the Virgin Mother, the daughter of her Son, humble and high, and these paradoxes climax in the image of the radical reversal of God’s infinite sphere contained in the circle of her womb. The paradoxes signal Bernard’s (and



Dante's) awareness of theological language exceeding common apprehension and infringing upon conventional grammar ordering logical structures of signification. The strained language climaxes in the image of the Incarnation, which is like a bud burst forth into a flower and which highlights the scandal of the bond between the divine and the human. The paradoxes, thus, convey the new system of values that characterizes the specificity of the Christian vision of the sacred: birth and incarnational reality.<sup>22</sup>

Because the prayer aims at celebrating the irruption of the sacred in history, Dante's representation of the sacred is experienced though one further stylistic detail: the repetition of the familiar "tu" and "te" in Bernard's address to the Virgin. Bernard subsumes the Franciscan assumption of familiarity and ordinariness between the human and the divine, and this notion of familiarity runs parallel to the marked physicality of the image of Mary. The primary effect of the physical and human trait of Mary is to hollow out any pure intellectualism disseminated by Joachistic theories of the spiritual, disembodied third age of history that would cut mankind off from its constitutive corporeality, and to dismiss the Platonic notion of the body as the prison of the soul. The event of the double birth—of Mary and her Son—ushers in the re-construction of history, the Benedictines pursue, as the emergence of a new ethics. By the focus on the body and the physicality of Mary, Dante makes the body neither a boundary nor a barrier. From her body's openness to the divine we evince a new understanding of "nature" as the originating ground of life and as the place where the very nobility of the human is found. Mary, so the text tells us, "ennobled human nature." The phrase asks us to answer or ponder the ancient questions about what it is to be human and how we are to understand the nobility of humanness. The answer resides in the central paradox of Mary's essence and election. In her figure the human is touched by the divine and the divine, who is incarnated into a man, is revealed as the God who loves the fragility of the human flesh. Her nobility, thus, embodies the new ethics of humility as loftiness, and of loftiness as humility. This paradoxical ethics surpasses the propositions of the Aristotelian ethical doctrine that, with its fiction of single-minded rational authority, fails to penetrate the syntax of the divine economy. The ethics Mary engenders, on the other hand, brings us to a deeper insight: she actually stands for a new *ethos*, and the term is to be understood for a new way of being on earth and a new way of thinking and contemplating

history, which Augustine, Francis, and Benedict had fully grasped. Namely, Mary submits to God and, in this way, by accepting the limits of being human, she rises to the encounter with the divine.

This representation of Mary brings into focus and contrasts with the unique situation of the pilgrim's concrete, historical (and Augustinian idea of) self who, thanks to Bernard's intercessions, wants to pierce, as Mary did, the boundary between the material and the spiritual, the human and the divine. Dante is not a phantasm or a pure spirit. He is embodied, and the body to him means the boundaries of his subjectivity and selfhood. In this sense, the paradoxes St. Bernard directs to the Virgin (in a language which, as has been widely acknowledged, recalls his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*) express simultaneously his mystical vision of what later will be known as the "coincidence of opposites" centered on his theology of love and Dante's own desires: the impulse of his material self to experience the divine. The prayers for the beatific vision, however, shift into the poet's own prayers and seek to record what he has seen and to write about it so that his *favella* may turn into a "favilla" (*Par.* 33.71) of God's glory, so that a sign of his "victory" can be left for the benefit of the "futura gente" (72). In this last challenge, the poet is willing to fragment language and make of it the display of palpable, external signs, of sparks to reorient readers and to trace their way in the night. Weighed on the scale of all the poet has seen, the prayer displaces the poem into a form of representation. But the spark, the sign, has also become a *res*, the concrete work productive of the future. Prayer and poetry now part their ways and yet go hand in hand. Together they echo and remind us of the inviolable core at the heart of love. From his last effort it appears that Dante's work of art, as a poem of love, can only be a work, akin to Bonaventure's idea of art and to the Benedictine sense of contemplation while on the way. This work marks a journey, which, in keeping with the generosity of the birth-event, inaugurates a metaphysics of fecundity and production whereby human agency, freedom, and the sense of the future, which a prayer encompasses, share in the hopeful desire to bring about the spiritual re-construction of the world.

Yale University  
New Haven, Connecticut

## NOTES

1. See, for instance, Erich Auerbach, "Dante's Prayer to the Virgin and Earlier Eulogies," *Romance Philology* 3 (1949–50): 1–26, available in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur romanischen Philologie* (Bern: Francke, 1967), 123–44; Mario Fubini, "L'ultimo canto del *Paradiso*," in *Il peccato di Ulisse e altri scritti danteschi* (Milan: Ricciardi, 1966), 101–36; Mario Aversano, "San Bernardo e Dante," *L'Alighieiri* 29 (1988): 37–45; Steven Botterill, *Dante and the Mystical Tradition: Bernard of Clairvaux in the Commedia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), esp. 148–93.

2. In recent times two excellent theological studies of prayer have appeared: Romano Guardini, *Prayer in Practice*, translated from the German by Leopold of Loweinstein-Wertheim (New York, 1957); and Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Prayer*, trans. A. V. Littledale (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1961). Surprisingly, although one would expect it from these two distinguished Dante scholars, neither has examined the role of prayer in the *Divine Comedy*.

3. The liturgy of the *Divine Comedy* has recently been studied by Erminia Ardisino, *Tempo Liturgico e tempo Storico nella "Commedia" di Dante* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2009).

4. Compare the definition of God as love in the last line of the poem: "l'amor che move il sole e le altre stelle" (the love that moves the sun and the other stars, *Par.* 33.145). Quotations from and translations of the *Divine Comedy* are taken from Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. John D. Sinclair (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), 3 vols.

5. "Have mercy on me whoever you are." This Psalm has a rich exegetical history. See, for instance, St. Augustine, *In Psalmum L enarratio sermo*, PL 36, 590; see also Thomas Aquinas, *ST* I-II, q. 81, a.1. As far as Dante goes, Robert Hollander, "Dante's use of the Fiftieth Psalm," *Dante Studies* 91 (1973): 145–50, correctly points out the presence of the psalm in each of the three canticles of the poem.

6. "O light Supreme that art so far exalted . . . grant to my mind again a little of what thou appearedst and give my tongue such power that it may leave but a gleam of your glory to the people yet to come."

7. "Now I pray you, by that power which guides you to the summit of the stairs in due time to be heedful of my pain."

8. Through Francesca's language Dante traces what I would call the *topology* of prayer, the link between prayer and place: her consciousness of her displacement in *Inferno* emerges from her sense of the impossibility or unsuitability of prayer in the place where she finds herself: "Se fosse amico il re dell'universo, / noi pregheremmo lui della tua pace" (*Inf.* 5.91–92).

9. "Most high, all-powerful, all good, Lord ! / All praise is yours, all glory, all honor / And all blessing. / To you, alone, Most High, do they belong. / No mortal lips are worthy / To pronounce your name. / All praise be yours, my Lord, through all that you have made, / And first my lord Brother Sun, / Who brings the day; and light you give to us through him. / How beautiful is he, how radiant in all his splendor! / Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness. All praise be yours, My Lord, through Sister Moon and Stars: / . . . All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Earth, our mother, / Who feeds us in her sovereignty and produces / Various fruits with colored flowers and herbs. / All praise be yours, My Lord, through those who grant pardon. / For love of you; . . . All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Death, / From whose embrace no mortal can escape: / . . . Praise and bless my Lord, and give him thanks / And serve him with great humility." The translation is taken from St. Francis of Assisi, *Writings and Early Biographies: English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St. Francis*, trans. Raphael Brown et al., edited by Marion A. Habig (Chicago, Ill.: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983), 130–31.

10. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1029b10, trans. Richard Hope (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 134.

11. The etymology belongs to the repertory of medieval allegory. But the insight is also shared in our times by Paul Claudel, *Cinq grandes odes*, II, in *Oeuvre poétique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), 242. More generally, see Jean-Louis Chrétien, *Le regard de l'amour* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2000).

12. *De vulgari eloquentia*, 1.4.3–4, ed. A. Marigo, rev. Pier Giorgio Ricci (Florence: Le Monnier, 1968), 22. Compare Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* 8.1.

13. See my “The *Vita nuova* and the Language of Poetry,” *Rivista di studi italiani* 1 (1983): 1–16.

14. The *regio dissimilitudinis* has been studied by John Freccero, “Dante’s Prologue Scene,” *Dante Studies* 84 (1966): 1–25.

15. “Our Father, who are in Heaven, not circumscribed, but through the greater love thou hast for thy first works on high, praised be thy name and thy worth by every creature, as it is meet to render thanks to thy sweet effluence. May the peace of thy kingdom come to us, for we cannot reach it of ourselves, if it come not, for all our striving. As thine angels make sacrifice to thee of their will, singing Hosanna, so let men make of theirs. Give us this day our daily manna, without which he backward goes through this harsh desert, who most labors to advance. As we forgive everyone the wrong we have suffered, even do Thou in loving-kindness pardon, and regard not our desert. Our strength, which is easily overcome, put not to trial with the old adversary, but deliver us from him, who so spurs it. This last petition, dear Lord, we make not for ourselves, for there is no need, but for those who remained behind us.’ Thus praying good speed for themselves and for us, those shadows were going under the burden. . . .”

16. I am quoting from Thomas Aquinas, *Compendio di Teologia e altri scritti*, ed. A. Selva and T. Centi in “Classici delle religioni” (Turin: UTET, 2001), 332ff.

17. “Among other times, one day during this fast St. Francis came out of his cell in fervor of spirit and went to pray in a cavity nearby under a rock, below which there is a horrible and fearful precipice and a great drop to the ground. All of a sudden the devil appeared in a terrifying form, amid a great uproar, and began to beat him in order to throw him down. Having nowhere to flee and being unable to endure the exceedingly cruel sight of the devil, St. Francis quickly turned around, with his hands and face and his whole body against the rock. And he commended himself to God, while groping with his hands for anything that he could grasp.” *Little Flowers of St. Francis* in St. Francis of Assisi, *Writings and Early Biographies*, 1442.

18. I am quoting from *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, trans. Rex Warner (New York: New American Library, 2001), 1. The celebration of the life of St. Francis in the symmetrically corresponding canto 11 of *Paradiso* gives further weight to the claim that Dante intends to evoke the Franciscan vision of prayer.

19. I have discussed at some length the cantos in my *Dante’s Vision and the Circle of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 154–73.

20. For further remarks on the sense of contemplation and its links to time and to the figure of Saturn, see my *Dante’s Vision and the Circle of Knowledge*, 154–73.

21. The conjunction between Mary’s “sublimity” as a going beyond the threshold of the human has been explored in a fresh and suggestive key by Unn Falkeid in her lecture “Gaspara Stampa and the Sublimity of Passions,” delivered at the session on “Rethinking Gaspara Stampa in the Canon of Renaissance Poetry I,” at the Annual Meeting of the Renaissance Society of America (Washington, D.C., March 22–24, 2012).

22. My reflections on the theology of the body have been clarified by a number of recent works. Among which I limit myself to mentioning the following: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1968); Kevin Corcoran, ed., *Soul, Body, and Survival: Essays on the Metaphysics of the Human Persons* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001); and William A. Cohen, *Embodied: Victorian Literature and the Senses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

# Dante's Definition of Life

HEATHER WEBB

Medieval Aristotelian natural philosophy held that life was entirely dependent on the soul's vivifying action in the heart. When the heart ceased to move, the individual died. The soul was thought to flee from the heart (often out of the mouth, if the heart was not wounded) and into the next world.<sup>1</sup> The movement of the heart was a sensible indicator of life, but human life itself was not defined by this physical phenomenon. Medieval definitions were generally concerned with ensoulment, an issue that at present no longer occupies the center of discussions about life even in religious contexts.<sup>2</sup> In Italy in 2005, a public debate erupted in the aftermath of the referendums on the "Legge 40," of February 19, 2004, "Norme in materia di procreazione medicalmente assistita." Giovanni Sartori, a prominent political scientist and regular op-ed contributor to the *Corriere della Sera*, wrote a series of pieces in which he posed questions about what it is that defines human life, making reference to the writings of Thomas Aquinas on the development of the human soul and criticizing the church for its unwillingness to engage such discourses. Umberto Eco responded by bolstering Sartori's views with a number of additional examples from the *Summa Theologiae*. It is the insertion of medieval texts into the contemporary public discussion of the definition of human life that I wish to consider here.

This essay will suggest some ways in which Dante's literary articulation of the boundaries of human life could transform the rigid battle lines that define the contemporary debate. Public intellectuals have employed Aquinas as an easy ally against the current pope, whose earlier writings on human life still constitute the core of church guidelines on the subject, but Dante's nuanced description of ensoulment troubles the very terms of

opposition that would separate Aquinas and Pope Benedict XVI.<sup>3</sup> Rhetoric and politics often lead us to forget what is at the heart of these issues: that is, what is the nature of human life? In what way, or at what point, is life sacred? When does life begin? To these questions, Dante provides potent answers as well as ways of thinking that help frame the issues themselves. I will examine the ways in which Dante's thought can productively redefine the current debate particularly regarding two issues: personal presence as distinct from biological identity and the interplay between mediated and unmediated processes of creation. I begin by outlining the ways in which the Italian discussion of 2005 and the ensuing years has marshaled Aquinas to oppose recent declarations on life by the Magisterium, the teaching authority of the church. I will analyze Pope Benedict XVI's use of the concepts of personal presence and the "immediacy" of the soul, tracing the notion of the "immediacy" of the soul from Benedict XVI to Pope Pius XII to Aquinas to Dante and the notion of personal presence from Benedict XVI to Pope John Paul II to Dante. Dante is my end point in each case, and I argue that his nuanced view of these concepts is particularly challenging for our contemporary models of thought, which have tended to oversimplify problems in service of the dominant ideologies on both sides.

In the *Corriere della Sera* (February 28, 2005) Giovanni Sartori criticized the church of John Paul II for evading the question of the soul, focusing instead on what church authorities referred to as the defense of new life. But what life are we talking about? Sartori asked. Does it include that of plants as well? What is the difference between any life and human life in particular? The religious answer always had to do with the soul: "Ma oggi l'anima viene dimenticata, la Chiesa non ne parla quasi mai più. L'omissione è stupefacente. Ma tant'è," claims Sartori. To counter the church's assertion that science has demonstrated that the embryo itself constitutes a human individual, Sartori notes that biology, and science in general, entirely avoids addressing such questions. What defines a human individual is the sort of question that must be answered in religious terms or in philosophical terms. Sartori claims that any church that refuses to speak of when a soul begins to animate a body, an argument that Aquinas examined in great detail, becomes "una religione che si appiattisce su una concezione biologica della vita."<sup>4</sup>

In his intervention in support of Sartori, Umberto Eco stressed that, according to Aquinas, God infuses the rational soul only into a body that

is already formed, which is to say, only after the fetus has developed first a vegetative soul and then a sensitive soul. An embryo having only a sensitive soul is not, or not yet, human. In fact, according to the supplement to the *Summa Theologiae* (80.4), when the bodies of the dead are returned to individuals at the Last Judgment, embryos will not be resurrected. Hence Eco's provocative title to his March 15, 2005, piece in *L'Espresso*: "Embrioni alla porta del Paradiso." Eco goes on to observe that the church's resistance to evolutionary theory was due not primarily to the conflict with the story of the creation taking place over seven days, as it has long been acceptable to think that the Bible speaks through metaphors, but primarily due to the fact that evolutionary theory

cancellava il salto radicale, la differenza miracolosa tra forme di vita pre-umane e l'apparizione dell'Uomo, annullava la differenza tra una scimmia, che è animale bruto, e un uomo che ha ricevuto un'anima razionale. Poi lentamente la chiesa ha non dico sostenuto ma ammesso il darwinismo purché si riconoscesse che, nella continuità della catena della vita dal primo unicellulare ad Adamo, s'inseriva una spaccatura, il momento in cui a un essere vivente viene conferita un'anima immortale.

Eco argues that those who would hold that the embryo is already human simply because it could become human are in actuality repeating the view taken by the materialist evolutionary theorists of former days. Such a conception would entail no "spaccatura" but rather a sameness or perfect continuity in the evolutionary process from vegetable to animal to human. All life would consequently have to have the same value, and therefore killing a mosquito, Eco remarks, would have to be defined as murder.<sup>5</sup>

Biological continuity is indeed the favored concept of those who intend to defend embryonic life. One of the many Italian Christian Web sites that have sprung up in the wake of these public discussions highlights a citation from Edoardo Boncinelli, a geneticist who also weighed in on the debate: "Dal punto di vista biologico non c'è in sostanza nessuna discontinuità dal concepimento alla nascita e oltre."<sup>6</sup> But it is discontinuity that has always sustained religious positions on the subject of evolution and, until recently, embryology. The moment of the soul's arrival was understood to absolutely separate human and eternal life from animal and finite existence.

Here, however, we must turn to look more closely at documents representing the other side in the public debate. The current pope, of course,

knows his Aquinas well (although he professes himself an Augustinian and not a particular follower of Aquinas's thought) and has shown both knowledge of and interest in Dante's writings as well.<sup>7</sup> And it is his document, prepared when he was Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, that still qualifies as the most important statement on the church's position on the definition of human life: the "Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and On the Dignity of Procreation: Replies to Certain Questions of the Day," dated February 22, 1987, drafted for Pope John Paul II. The "Instruction *Dignitas Personae* on Certain Bioethical Questions," prepared by Cardinal William Levada from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, on September 8, 2008, for Pope Benedict XVI, adds to church positions on specific issues but maintains the guiding principles from Ratzinger's 1987 document and addresses the question of the soul as determinant of human life only through citation of Ratzinger's document.

On the question of the soul, Ratzinger's 1987 document, also known as *Donum Vitae*, states:

Recent findings of human biological science . . . recognize that in the zygote resulting from fertilization the biological identity of a new human individual is already constituted. Certainly no experimental datum can be in itself sufficient to bring us to the recognition of a spiritual soul; nevertheless, the conclusions of science regarding the human embryo provide a valuable indication for discerning by the use of reason a personal presence at the moment of this first appearance of a human life: how could a human individual not be a human person? The Magisterium has not expressly committed itself to an affirmation of a philosophical nature, but it constantly reaffirms the moral condemnation of any kind of procured abortion. This teaching has not been changed and is unchangeable. . . . Thus the fruit of human generation, from the first moment of its existence, that is to say from the moment the zygote has formed, demands the unconditional respect that is morally due to the human being in his bodily and spiritual totality.<sup>8</sup>

This passage introduces equivalencies between a series of terms. It lays its claim to validity on the basis of "recent findings of human biological science" and "the conclusions of science," rather than past theological teachings. The document equates biological identity with personal presence and the presence of a spiritual soul. And yet one could argue that biological identity is not the same thing as personal presence. In the case of twins, the zygote forms multiple personal presences. And many zygotes never in fact become embryos.<sup>9</sup> The document speaks of the soul in only



two other instances, one of which quotes Pope John Paul II in his address to the World Medical Association: "Each human person, in his absolutely unique singularity, is constituted not only by his spirit, but by his body as well. Thus, in the body and through the body, one touches the person himself in his concrete reality. To respect the dignity of man consequently amounts to safeguarding this identity of the man '*corpore et anima unus*,' as the Second Vatican Council says (*Gaudium et Spes*, 14, par.1)." <sup>10</sup> Personal presence, by this definition, requires a unity between body and soul. If the zygote is not yet a body, can this constitute a personal presence even if we assume that the soul is already present?

Ratzinger argues that the soul is already present, stressing the importance of the "first moment" of conception: "From the moment of conception, the life of every human being is to be respected in an absolute way because man is the only creature on earth that God has 'wished for himself' and the spiritual soul of each man is 'immediately created' (*immediatamente* in the Italian version of the document) by God; his whole being bears the image of the Creator."<sup>11</sup> Reading this document, one is led to believe that he means that the soul is created as soon as the zygote is formed, which is the moment of conception. The proximity in the sentence between "the moment of conception" and the citation "immediately created" suggests that "immediately" has to do with temporality.

The term *immediacy* has a long history in this context, one that expresses a completely different concept with regard to the fetus. In his encyclical *Humani generis*, delivered in 1950, Pius XII states that discussion of evolution is permissible "in as far as it inquires into the origin of the human body as coming from pre-existent and living matter—for the Catholic faith obliges us to hold that souls are *immediately* created by God."<sup>12</sup> In this case, immediacy means that the soul is created new by God and that the soul must not be understood to be made of preexistent matter. It does not suggest anything about the moment of the appearance of such soul in a zygote or embryo or fetus. Ratzinger's document thus gives the appearance of citing previous authority on the question of the existence of the soul at the first moment, but the words "immediately created" appear in a different context in the earlier document and effectively mean something quite different.

*Immediata* is also a key word for Aquinas (in fact, that which is "immediata" and the notion of change in the nature of the being prior to birth are linked concepts). But he does not use the term to maintain that God

creates the human soul immediately at the moment of conception; quite the contrary. Aquinas, in fact, argues that there is a change in the nature of the subject formed before its birth:

The species of the subject formed, however, does not remain the same; since at first it possesses the form of semen, afterwards of blood, and so on, until at last it arrives at that wherein it finds its fulfillment. For, although the generation of simple bodies does not proceed in serial order, since each of them possesses a form related *immediately* to prime matter, a progressive order must obtain in the generation of other bodies because of the many intermediate forms between the first elemental form and the ultimate form which is the object of the generative process; so that there are many generations and corruptions following one another.<sup>13</sup>

That is, the species of the subject undergoes change, in that between semen and a completely formed human life there is a great distance that can only be accomplished by the generation and corruption of numerous intermediate forms. The only generation that can occur immediately (or without mediation) is that of a simple body, not a complex one such as a body endowed with a rational soul. Furthermore, Aquinas stresses that “the process of generation is not entirely continuous, and there are many intermediate generations.”<sup>14</sup> The more complex the life form, the more discontinuous the process of its generation or generations. Generation, in the case of human life, becomes, in fact, a plural. We might just as well refer to the *generations* of the individual human life.

The process, Aquinas argues, is radically discontinuous in terms of the soul, as the succession of each new type of soul requires the corruption of the previous one:

Therefore, the more noble a form is and the further removed it is from the elemental form, the more numerous must be the intermediate forms, through which the ultimate form is reached step by step, and, consequently, the intervening generative processes will be multiplied too. That is why, in the generation of an animal and a man, wherein the most perfect type of form exists, there are many intermediate forms and generations—and, hence, corruptions, because the generation of one thing is the corruption of another. Thus, the vegetative soul, which is present first (when the embryo lives the life of a plant), perishes, and is succeeded by a more perfect soul, both nutritive and sensitive in character, and then the embryo lives an animal life; and when this passes away it is succeeded by the rational soul introduced from without, while the preceding souls existed in virtue of the semen.<sup>15</sup>

According to Aquinas, the first two souls are the product of semen, while the third is introduced by external means and thus is of an entirely different character. It is not produced by the mother or the father but rather arrives directly from God. And here we have our radical “spaccatura” between vegetative/animal life and the human.

On the temporal relationship between body and soul, Aquinas explains that “it follows that the human body, so far as it is in potentiality to the soul, as not yet having one, precedes the soul in time; it is, then, not actually human, but only potentially human. However, when the body is actually human, as being perfected by the human soul, it neither precedes nor follows the soul, but is simultaneous with it.”<sup>16</sup> The point of departure for Aquinas and for other medieval thinkers on this issue was Genesis 2:7: “Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.”<sup>17</sup> First the body is formed, then the spirit is infused by divine breath. Life follows this second step. Each new birth in this way mirrors the creation of Adam.

Aquinas describes this breath of life as immediate, but immediate understood in a sense that translation does not render:

Nor does the argument follow . . . that if the soul is not produced by the seminal power, but only the body, then the operation both of God and of nature is imperfect. The inference is false, because both the body and the soul are made by the power of God; although the formation of the body derives from Him by means of the natural power residing in the semen, whereas He produces the soul *immediately*.<sup>18</sup>

Immediately here is translated from the Latin “immediate” and clearly in this case means “without mediation” rather than “right away.” So when Ratzinger’s text says that God produces the soul “immediately,” his language resonates with a particular tradition of discussion of immediacy in the production of the soul. Yet he is in fact sidestepping that discussion. Rather than distinguishing between that which is mediated and that which is unmediated in the creation of the individual human person, Ratzinger shifts this term to emphasize the first moment of conception. He suggests that biological identity would indicate a personal presence and therefore a spiritual soul. The zygote is the union of the sperm and egg and thus would seem to indicate that the soul is in the DNA or the biological material supplied by the parents. In this case, the action of the

divine is entirely mediated by human action. If “immediately” has simply come to mean right away, or from the first moment of conception, its use would in effect leave out God’s unmediated creation of each individual immortal soul.

Dante’s distinctions between biological identity and personal presence, understood as the relation between those aspects of human creation that are mediated and those that are unmediated, reveal a depth and dimensionality for thinking on these issues that has been lost in the current debate. Particularly important in this regard is Statius’s description of the formation of the fetus in *Purgatorio* 25. The passage has received significant critical attention from scholars such as Bruno Nardi, John Freccero, Giuseppe Mazzotta, Rachel Jacoff, Patrick Boyde, Zygmunt Barański, Manuele Gragnolati, and Simon Gilson, who have situated it in the context of Dante’s poetics more generally and in the context of the debates on natural philosophy and theology of the period.<sup>19</sup> I refer the reader particularly to *Experiencing the Afterlife*, in which Gragnolati succinctly and precisely elucidates the historical context of the debate into which Dante enters as well as the subsequent critical debate on his relation to his sources. I am interested here in placing Dante’s text into conversation with the contemporary debate, particularly insofar as it relates to Ratzinger’s notions of personal presence and the mediated nature of creation. Statius here is discussing the joining of the male and the female blood and what ensues:

“Ivi s’accoglie l’uno e l’altro insieme, / l’un disposto a patire, e l’altro a fare / per lo perfetto loco onde si preme; / e giunto lui, comincia ad operare / coagulando prima, e poi avviva / ciò che per sua matra fè constare. / Anima fatta la virtute attiva / qual d’una pianta, in tanto differente, / che questa è in via e quella è già a riva, / tanto ovra poi, che già si move e sente, / come spugno marino; e indi imprende / ad organar le posse ond’è semente. / Or si spiega, figliuolo, or si distende / la virtù ch’è dal cor del generante, / dove natura a tutte membra intende. / Ma come d’animal divegna fante, / non vedi tu ancor: quest’ è tal punto, / che più savio di te fè già errante, / sì che per sua dottrina fè disgiunto / da l’anima il possibile intelletto, / perché da lui non vide organo assunto. / Apra la verità che viene il petto; / e sappi che, sì tosto come al feto / l’articular del cerebro è perfetto, / lo motor primo a lui si volge lieto / sovra tant’ arte di natura, e spira / spirito novo, di virtù repleto, / che ciò che trova attivo quivi, tira / in sua sustanzia, e fassi un’alma sola, / che vive e sente e sé in sé rigira. / E perché meno ammiri la parola, / guarda il calor del sol che si fa vino, / giunto a l’omor che de la vite cola.” (*Purg.* 25.46–84)<sup>20</sup>

Dante divides blood into two varieties, that which is consumed by the veins and that which continues to be refined within the heart. This perfect, or perfected, blood, imbued with formative power, will be transformed into semen so that it may shape another body. In conception, the semen begins to act on the mother's blood in the womb, and the shape of the body begins to emerge. Here Statius describes first how the active virtue, or the force that quickens and gives form to the passive blood in the womb, becomes first a vegetative (plantlike) soul and then a sensitive (animal) soul. Then follows something of a dramatic pause before Statius describes "come d'animal diveгна fante." He explains that this is the "punto" that has caused others to err. He forcefully rejects the error of Averroës, who interpreted Aristotle as maintaining that the possible and the active intellect were separate from the individual human soul. There are a number of issues to note here, in the space of the pause that Statius creates. First, that the transition described here is from animal to "fante," or speaking creature. It is speech that makes the human, according to Dante, a distinction that recalls his depiction of the creation of Adam in the *De vulgari eloquentia*.<sup>21</sup> In Book 1 he states that God gave Adam the power of speech immediately after creating him and that the first word Adam spoke was the name of God, El, as an expression of love for his Creator.<sup>22</sup>

Second, the transition from animal to human is described as a "punto." "Punto," as Christian Moevs points out, is a crucial term in the *Commedia*.<sup>23</sup> From "solo un punto fu quel che ci vinse" in Francesca's speech of *Inferno* 5 to the "punto" that is God in the upper reaches of Paradiso, the *punto* in the *Commedia* is a turning point, or eventually, the point around which all things turn. Here, the term *punto* gives great weight to this particular moment in the development of the human: it is the critical moment of conjunction between the human and the divine. In fact, by calling it a *punto*, Dante gives us to understand that the nature of the event in question is not a transition or even a transformation of what is already present but rather is as explosive in its being as a point. The point shares in the nature of God in that it is unextended but contains within itself an infinite capacity for extension. It contains ingathered diversity in paradoxical copresence. Averroës's error lies in making "disgiunto" that which is in fact copresent. He fails to understand because he does not see a corporeal organ for the possible intellect. The truth that the pilgrim must come to know here (by opening his heart to the revelation) is a complicated

one that defies human comprehension and cannot be discerned by an examination of a human being's corporeal presence. In fact, the pilgrim is not told to open his mind or his eyes to the truth, but rather, his "petto," just as the final unfolded vision of God at the end of the *Paradiso* will be retained in the heart: "ancor mi distilla / nel core il dolce che nacque da essa" (*Par.* 33.62–63). As Zygmunt Barański points out, it is this aspect of revelation that is missing in the *Convivio*, where the poet laments the fact that this process "non è cosa da manifestare a lingua, lingua, dico, veramente volgere."<sup>24</sup> Statius will make use of the language of scripture as well as metaphoric language to convey a truth that is otherwise inaccessible.

For Dante, as for Aquinas, the intellectual or rational soul is breathed into the body by God himself; it is a "spirito novo." It is immediate in the sense that it is new and that it is unmediated; it arrives directly from joyful contact with the creator of all. But for Dante, it is at this moment that a crucial unification takes place: the soul infused by God pulls the preexisting souls into itself and becomes a single unified soul. As we have seen above, Aquinas states that the generation of a new soul entails the corruption of the previous one. Dante, instead, emphasizes the copresence of mediated and unmediated elements in the soul of the fetus.<sup>25</sup> There are two creative forces here, the "cor del generante, / dove natura a tutte membra intende" and "lo motor primo." We see how God takes joy in what nature has created (nature being God's child), being "lieto / sovra tant'arte di natura" as He breathes in a "spirito novo." In these lines, we see the union between the mediated and unmediated aspects of the soul. Nature's work, which is God's work mediated through the human parents, is pulled into the substance of the inspired, unmediated divine soul. Thus biological identity is transformed into personal presence, that is, the union of nature's art and God's breath within. The product is three souls made one and three parents made into one human individual. This is a perfected unification, modeled on the Trinity: the fetus only becomes a person when all three entities merge into one.<sup>26</sup>

Such emphasis on integration leads to a vision of circulation as the mechanism and manifestation of perfected unity. After God breathes the rational soul into the fetus, it celebrates its own perfection by means of a circular motion—"sé in sé rigira"—by turning itself back on itself. Its cyclical movement is one with the universal creative force. The perpetual turning replicates, for Dante, the circular movement of the entire universe and all the beings in the universe inspired by love for the Creator. His

vision of God in the uppermost regions of Paradise is a revelation of the divine as a point encircled by swiftly spinning angels. The circles of angels closer to that point spin faster, while those more distant from it spin more slowly.

“Da quel punto  
depende il cielo e tutta la natura.  
Mira quel cerchio che più li è congiunto;  
e sappi che 'l suo muovere è sì tosto  
per l'affocato amore ond' elli è punto.”  
(*Par.* 28.41–45)

The creation of the unified soul in the fetus occurs when it begins to move in syntony with the universe. Its circular motion both celebrates and participates in the divine nature of the point that, like the soul, is revealed to be plural rather than singular: “tre giri,” a “luce eterna che sola in te sidi, / sola t'intendi, e da te intelletta / e intendente te ami e arridi” (*Par.* 33.124–26). The “sè in sè rigira” of the fetus suggests not only an entry into the circulation around the central point of the universe that is God but also a turning upon itself that implies a microcosmic self-consciousness on the model of the divine self-knowledge.

As is always the case with Dante, we find that his “Trinitarian thought,” as Olivia Holmes calls it, breaks down binary oppositions.<sup>27</sup> The human soul is produced by a process that is both continuous and discontinuous, mediated and unmediated. The soul infused by God is produced in a moment of radical rupture, but one that is also part of a gradual process. Dante insists that the preceding vegetative and sensitive souls are pulled into and made one with the divinely inspired soul, which stipulates continuity between the vegetative soul, say, and the final human soul of the “fante.” Statius notes that the soul of a plant has already “arrived” at its final goal, while the vegetative soul of the embryo is on its way (“in via”) to becoming something else.

At the same time, Dante insists that the rational soul is inspired only after the articulation of the brain is perfected. And there is no denying that the rational soul is radically discontinuous from what has come before. It comes, as Aquinas also notes, from outside, from God himself, and therefore is entirely of another order than the liquid substances of human generation. At the same time, it is something other that nonetheless finds union with the more material souls that precede it. Dante's metaphor for

how wine is created is helpful here: the divinely inspired soul is likened to the heat of the sun and the vegetative and animal souls are likened to the sap that flows within the vine. The souls are thus of different natures but can work together to complete a certain process. Together they become yet another entity, each entirely transformed by the interaction.

Dante explains in the *Convivio* that the divinely inspired soul is limited in its expression by what it finds in the humanly generated soul of the fetus:

Secondo la sua puritade [of the humanly generated soul], discende in essa la vertude intellettuale possibile che detta è, e come detto è. E s'elli avviene che, per la puritade de l'anima ricevente, la intellettuale vertude sia bene astratta e assoluta da ogni ombra corporea, la divina bontade in lei multiplica, sì come in cosa sufficiente a ricevere quella, e quindi si multiplica, ne l'anima di questa intelligenza [dotata, la divina influenza] secondo che ricevere puote.<sup>28</sup>

Like the souls in *Paradiso* that receive as much of God's light as they can contain, in varying quantities according to their capacity, so the soul of the fetus is a product of the individual capacity of the receiving soul, as determined by the parents, the disposition of the celestial spheres, and an abundance of divine generosity.

For Dante, the human soul possesses components that are both mediated and unmediated; error around the moment in which the divinely infused soul arrives is very easy, and very dangerous. Like the vision of God in *Paradiso*, it is a point that reveals itself eventually to be a trinity—one that is three and three that are one. To misapprehend its nature is to fail to understand the distinction between, and the union between, body and the spirit, nature and God. One can err by separating the elements too starkly or by conflating them. To conflate them is to commit to a materialistic understanding of life. To hold them as entirely separate is instead a dualistic vision of life. Dante's Trinitarian thought overcomes this problem by finding another way.

It is only by making the right sort of distinctions between that which is mediated and bodily and that which is unmediated and eternal that we may understand Dante's notion of personal presence. In *Inferno*, we are given examples of individuals who have not understood that which is of divine origin in their being and have seen themselves simply as the products of nature. Their contrapasso shows us their error by rendering their vision of themselves visible to all observers or readers. The suicides, for



instance, have become trees, having made the doubly fatal error of imagining their beings to be physical. As Christian Moevs notes, sin is self-identification with the body.<sup>29</sup> Inflicting two deaths upon themselves, the death of the body and the so-called death of the soul (the condemnation to hell), they have taken a terrifying slide down the great chain of being, revealing the infernal nature of seeing that chain as a continuity.<sup>30</sup>

Pier delle Vigne explains: "L'animo mio, per disdegnoso gusto, / credendo col morir fuggir disdegno, / ingiusto fece me contra me giusto." (*Inf.* 13.70–72) He has understood his existence as something material that can be done away with. He has divided himself, "me contra me," by turning his soul against his body. In so doing, he has radically misunderstood the nature of his being. He has been given, in his afterlife, that which he had imagined: "Quando si parte l'anima feroce / dal corpo ond'ella stessa s'è disvelta . . . cade in la selva . . . quivi germoglia come gran di spelta. / Surge in vermena ed in pianta silvestra" (*Inf.* 13.94–100). Whereas other souls grow shade bodies, the suicides are only permitted to complete the first stage of development of the soul, the vegetative.<sup>31</sup>

Like Averroës, Pier has seen something as "disgiunto" that instead is simultaneous. The elements of the "punto," that is, of the divinely created immortal soul, united with the material that precedes it, cannot be sundered by the individual. Destruction of the material is thus destruction of the spiritual; self-inflicted death of the body is the same as the death of the soul. When Dante states that "io sentia d'ogni parte trarre guai, / e non vedea *persona* che 'l facesse" (*Inf.* 13.22–23), he expresses the idea that what these shades have destroyed is precisely their own personal presence. The word *persona* for Dante signifies the body in union with the soul.<sup>32</sup> *Corpo*, on the other hand, tends to refer to the corpse, the body separated from the soul, "quando si parte l'anima feroce / dal *corpo* ond'ella stessa s'è disvelta" (94–95). Moreover, *persona* is also the term for denoting the triune unity of the Trinity: "Credo in tre persone etterne, e queste / credo una essenza sì una e sì trina, / che sofferà congiunto 'sono' ed 'este'" (*Par.* 24.139–41). Dante employs this term to describe the griffin, a figure for Christ, in Purgatorio: "la fiera / ch'è sola una *persona* in due nature" (*Purg.* 31.80–81). Christ is one person with two natures, human and divine. As Dante explains in the *Convivio*, each human person participates in the divine by means of the highest power of the human soul, reason.<sup>33</sup>

I have only begun to suggest here some ways in which our contemporary debates might be enriched by reflection on the histories of some fundamental definitions. At a moment when the discussion about the beginning of life has grown strident, Dante's thought can be particularly useful in a reasoned consideration of what we mean by the term "human life." The generation of human life occurs for Dante, unlike Aquinas, as a single process, and not as a series of processes. Within this single process, a Trinitarian soul comes into being, one aspect of which derives from a radically different origin from the others. When the divinely authored soul is breathed into the fetus, something completely distinct occurs. The human person that is created bears some relation to what precedes her or him. Such creation constitutes an event as explosive in its nature as the incarnation. Where religious and political definitions provide clear and polemical answers to the debate about when human life begins, Dante's synthesis of philosophical and theological concepts in a literary medium reveals all the nuance and complexity of the problem of understanding human life in reference to, but not as limited by, its biological basis. Dante's literary vision and his treatment of his contemporary theological concepts remind us that we grapple with questions of creation in the realm of interpretation, not from within a set of conclusions. As he puts it in the *Convivio*, "A me medesimo pare maraviglia come cotale produzi-one si può pur conchiudere e con lo intelletto vedere" (4.21.6).

University of Cambridge  
Cambridge, United Kingdom

## NOTES

1. On conceptions of the heart's role as a signifier of life and death, see Heather Webb, *The Medieval Heart* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

2. On the history of defining the presence of human life in embryonic or fetal form, including Dante and other medieval thinkers, see G. R. Dunstan, "The Moral Status of the Human Embryo: A Tradition Recalled," *Journal of Medical Ethics* 10, no. 1 (1984), 38–44, and David Albert Jones, *The Soul of the Embryo: An Enquiry into the Status of the Human Embryo in the Christian Tradition* (New York: Continuum, 2005).

3. Our medieval interlocutors have nothing to offer in the way of practical answers to the problems of today; it would be an unfaithful twisting of their words to extract a "stance" on abortion, for instance. If we did, the answer would not be appealing to either side: for Aquinas, human life in the fetus began at around forty days for a male and at around ninety days for a female. See Dunstan, "The Moral Status of the Human Embryo," 41. This timeframe is too late for those who oppose abortion

and too early for those who support a woman's right to abort a pregnancy within current delimitations such as viability.

4. See Giovanni Sartori, "La vita umana secondo ragione: Cosa distingue l'uomo dall'animale." *Corriere della Sera*, February 28, 2005; and Sartori, "Quando arriva l'anima: La Chiesa sorvola." *Corriere della Sera*, April 16, 2005.

5. Umberto Eco, "Embrioni alla porta del Paradiso." *L'Espresso* n. 10, March 15, 2005. See also Umberto Eco, *Il Medioevo: Barbari, cristiani, musulmani* (Milan: Encyclomedia Publishers, 2010), 34–35.

6. Edoardo Boncinelli "Non esiste l'ora X—Le domande dei cattolici," *Corriere della sera*, January 26, 2005, at <http://www.orarel.com/lifewords/articoli/boncinelli.shtml>, accessed August 1, 2011.

7. On Aquinas and Augustine in his formation, see Joseph Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs, 1927–1977* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 44. For an example of the pope's use of Dante, see his presentation on his first encyclical: <http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/45165>, accessed August 5, 2011.

8. "Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin," February 22, 1987, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19870222\\_respect-for-human-life\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19870222_respect-for-human-life_en.html); "Instruction *Dignitas Personae*," September 8, 2008, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20081208\\_dignitas-personae\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20081208_dignitas-personae_en.html), accessed August 5, 2011.

9. Boncinelli, "Non esiste l'ora X." See also Boncinelli, *L'etica della vita. Siamo uomini o embrioni* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2008).

10. "Respect for Human Life."

11. Ibid.

12. "*Humani Generis*," [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/pius\\_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xii\\_enc\\_12081950\\_humani-generis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_12081950_humani-generis_en.html), accessed August 5, 2011.

13. "Species tamen formati non manet eadem: nam primo habet formam seminis, postea sanguinis, et sic inde quousque veniat ad ultimum complementum. Licet enim generatio simplicium corporum non procedat secundum ordinem, eo quod quodlibet eorum habet formam immediatam materiae primae; in generatione tamen corporum aliorum, oportet esse generationum ordinem, propter multas formas intermedias, inter primam formam elementi et ultimam formam ad quam generatio ordinatur. Et ideo sunt multae generationes et corruptiones sese consequentes" (*Contra Gentiles*, lib. 2, cap. 89, n. 9): <http://www.corpusthomicum.org>. Translation by James F. Anderson, <http://dhspriory.org/thomas/ContraGentiles2.htm#89>, accessed August 5, 2011.

14. "Tota generationis transmutatio non est continua, sed sunt multae generationes intermediae" (*Contra Gentiles*, lib. 2, cap. 89, n. 10).

15. "Quanto igitur aliqua forma est nobilior et magis distans a forma elementi, tanto oportet esse plures formas intermedias, quibus gradatim ad formam ultimam veniatur, et per consequens plures generationes medias. Et ideo in generatione animalis et hominis in quibus est forma perfectissima, sunt plurimae formae et generationes intermediae, et per consequens corruptiones, quia generatio unius est corruptio alterius. Anima igitur vegetabilis, quae primo inest, cum embryo vivit vita plantae, corrumpitur, et succedit anima perfectior, quae est nutritiva et sensitiva simul, et tunc embryo vivit vita animalis; hac autem corrupta, succedit anima rationalis ab extrinseco immissa, licet praecedentes fuerint virtute seminis" (*Contra Gentiles*, lib. 2, cap. 89, n. 11).

16. "Corpus igitur humanum, secundum quod est in potentia ad animam, utpote cum nondum habet animam, est prius tempore quam anima: tunc autem non est humanum actu, sed potentia tantum. Cum vero est humanum actu, quasi per animam humanam perfectum, non est prius neque posterius anima, sed simul cum ea" (*Contra Gentiles*, lib. 2, cap. 89, n. 18).

17. <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis%202:7&version=NIV>, accessed August 5, 2011.

18. "Neque etiam sequitur, si anima ex virtute seminis non producitur sed solum corpus, quod sit imperfecta operatio tam Dei quam naturae, ut septima ratio procedebat. Virtute enim Dei utrumque fit, et corpus et anima: licet formatio corporis sit ab eo mediante virtute seminis naturali, animam autem immediate producat" (*Contra Gentiles* lib. 2, cap. 89, n. 19).

19. See, for example, Manuele Gragnolati, *Experiencing the Afterlife: Soul and Body in Dante and Medieval Culture* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2005); Zygmunt Barański, "Canto XXV," Simon A. Gilson, "The Anatomy and Physiology of the Human Body in the *Commedia*," in *Dante and the Human Body*, ed. John C. Barnes and Jennifer Petrie (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007); and Joseph Ziegler, "The Scientific Context of Dante's Embryology," in *Dante and the Human Body*; Rachel Jacoff, "Our Bodies, Our Selves: The Body in the *Commedia*," in *Sparks and Seeds: Medieval Literature and its Aftermath*, ed. Dana E. Stewart, Alison Cornish (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 119–37. These texts also review the previous scholarship. On Dante's use of Statius, see Teodolinda Barolini, *Dante's Poets: Textuality and Truth in the Comedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); on a poetics of birth in Dante more generally understood, see Giuseppe Mazzotta, "Dante's Poetics of Births and Foundations," *Dante Studies* 127 (2009): 129–46.

20. References to the *Purgatorio* are from Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi's edition (Milan: Mondadori, 2008).

21. See *De vulgari eloquentia* 1.4–5 as well as Steven Botterill's introduction in his translation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

22. See Jennifer Fraser "Dante/Fante: Embryology in Purgatory and Paradise" in *Dante and the Unorthodox: The Aesthetics of Transgression*, ed. James L. Miller (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), 290–309.

23. Christian Moevs, "'Il punto che mi vinse': Incarnation, Revelation and Self-Knowledge in Dante's *Commedia*," in *Dante's Commedia: Theology as Poetry*, ed. Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 267–85; Christian Moevs, *The Metaphysics of Dante's Comedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 126.

24. See *Convivio* 4.21.4–6, for another account of this process. I have used the edition of Giorgio Inglese (Milan: Rizzoli, 2007). For a comparison of the two accounts, see Zygmunt G. Barański, "Canto XXV," in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis: Purgatorio*, ed. Georges Guntert and Michelangelo Picone (Florence: Cesati, 2001), 389–422.

25. See Gragnolati, esp. 70–74, on how Dante's account differs from Aquinas's and in what ways it is indebted to Aquinas's concepts. Gragnolati also analyzes the critical debate on Dante's debt to or departure from Aquinas.

26. I say unification and not unicity. Unicity, as in Aquinas, holds that no substance can have two substantial forms at the same time—evolution of the embryo is thus discontinuous. See Gragnolati for a full discussion of these issues: *Experiencing the Afterlife*, 67–76.

27. Olivia Holmes, *Dante's Two Beloveds: Ethics and Erotics in the "Divine Comedy"* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

28. *Convivio* 4.21.8. See Moevs, *The Metaphysics of Dante's Comedy*, 127–28.

29. Moevs, *The Metaphysics of Dante's Comedy*, 125.

30. On Dante's use of the concept of the Chain of Being and the suicides' degradation to vegetable life, see Richard Lansing, "Dante's Concept of Violence and the Chain of Being," *Dante Studies* 99 (1977): 67–87, esp. 75–77.

31. On the death of the soul in the case of the suicides and the use of the term "persona" there, see Howard Needler, "The Birth and Death of the Soul," *Dante Studies* 122 (2004): 71–93.

32. Giorgio Petrocchi, *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata* (Florence: Casa Editrice Le Lettere, 1994), 192. On *persona*, see Alessandro Niccoli's entry in the *Enciclopedia dantesca*, vol. 4, 436–37.

33. "E quella anima che tutte queste potenze comprende, [ed] è perfettissima di tutte l'altre, è l'anima umana, la quale colla nobilitade della potenza ultima, cioè ragione, partecipa della divina natura a guisa di sempiterna Intelligenza: però che l'anima è tanto in quella sovrana potenza nobilitata e dinudata da materia, che la divina luce, come in angelo, raggia in quella: e però è l'uomo divino animale dalli filosofi chiamato" (*Conv.* 3.2.14).

# Bread of Angels: Dante Studies and the Moral Vision of Charles Eliot Norton

KATHLEEN VERDUIN

*Oh, blessed are those few who sit at the table where the bread of the angels is eaten. . . .*

—*Il Convivio*, First Treatise (trans. Norton)

*One closes the narrative of Dante's life and the study of his works with the conviction that he was not only one of the greatest among poets, but a man whose character gives to his poetry its highest and its most enduring interest.*

—Charles Eliot Norton, "Dante,"  
*Library of the World's Best Literature* (1896)

For much of the twentieth century the name of Charles Eliot Norton, if known at all, evoked a rapidly fading but unlamented New England gentility, the feeble protests of a dying class against, as in the famous parody by one of Norton's students, "the hor-ri-ble vul-gar-i-ty of EVERYTHING."<sup>1</sup> Memorialized by modernists (such as George Santayana and the critic Van Wyck Brooks) perhaps too eager to shake off the taint of Victorianism, Norton calcified into what Linda Dowling has termed his "established portrait": "the hidebound and pessimistic voice of a false and un-American aesthetic," a "neurasthenic culture snob and ineffectual political prig."<sup>2</sup> Even his blood relative T.S. Eliot, at least as a young man, thought of Norton merely as "crusty."<sup>3</sup>

But recent studies like Dowling's *Charles Eliot Norton: The Art of Reform in Nineteenth-Century America* and James Turner's respectful biography *The Liberal Education of Charles Eliot Norton* now force revaluation, both of Norton's character and of his prodigious role in the shaping of American

culture. In the course of his lifetime (1827–1908), Norton edited the influential *North American Review*, founded the *Nation*, created the Archaeological Institute of America and the American School of Classical Studies in Athens, published the correspondence of Emerson, Carlyle, Ruskin, and James Russell Lowell, and initiated courses in the fine arts at Harvard: and it is hardly an exaggeration to declare, as does Turner, that “the academic field of Dante studies in the United States owes its existence to him.” Not only did Norton teach Dante at Harvard from the 1870s almost until his death, but he produced original translations of the *Vita Nuova* and the entire *Commedia*, wrote scholarly treatises, organized the Dante Society of America and its annual publication, amassed an extensive library of manuscripts and texts, and promoted attention to the work of Dante in countless if sometimes invisible ways. As Turner points out, Norton

suggested lines of work, lent books, encouraged young scholars, helped them find their way to obscure sources. The first substantial works of American Dante scholarship—such as E. A. Fay’s concordance to the *Divina Commedia* and Charles S. Latham’s annotated *Translation of Dante’s Eleven Letters*—would almost certainly never have seen the light without his aid. T. W. Koch, founder of the great Cornell Dante collection and author of the first survey of American Dante scholarship, was his student. Charles Grandgent, the preeminent Dantist of the early twentieth century, was first his student, then his colleague, finally his successor. This “new generation of American Dantists,” the first rooted in the universities, were right to look on Norton as their “spiritual father.”<sup>4</sup>

My purpose is to bring forward Norton’s importance for the study of Dante in this country, an importance often acknowledged but less often explored in detail. But I am arrested more especially by the ways that Norton, in the almost poignantly transparent manner of other nineteenth-century American persons of letters, elevated Dante into a commanding internal presence, the *maestro ed autore* whose aura beamed back principles bred into Norton from childhood and espoused intentionally in the years of his maturity. Though Norton was indisputably involved with Dante on scholarly and aesthetic grounds, his writings attest to Dante’s primary office for him as moral exemplar, a forebear of character and virtue, the dissemination of whose writings might not simply illuminate the serious reader but redress the vexing ailments of society. So vital that it could ultimately sustain institutionalization, Norton’s appropriation displays

from the outset the commitment to high rectitude and tireless service that define his legacy.

## I

Norton recognized that “the zeal of Dantesque studies and the influence of Dante upon modern thought” stemmed from “that great intellectual movement in Europe, which may be termed the romantic revival,” instigated, Norton notes, by the publication of Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* in 1765.<sup>5</sup> But his personal engagement with Dante is more immediately traceable to his social and familial matrix. Son of the “Unitarian Pope” Andrews Norton (1786–1853), Dexter Professor of Sacred Literature at Harvard, and Catharine Norton, a daughter of Boston’s mercantile class, Charles Norton grew up in a culture proud of its literacy: Shady Hill, the graceful Cambridge house where he was born and would die, hovers in Norton’s late elegy for “the old New England home” connected by books “with the wide life of mankind, with the poetic and historic past.”<sup>6</sup> Though never actually ordained, Andrews Norton belonged to a generation of clerical literati, liberal ministers like William Emerson (father of Ralph Waldo Emerson) and John Gorham Palfrey, who controlled such Boston periodicals as the *Monthly Anthology* and the *North American Review*. Himself the editor of the series *Select Journal of Foreign Periodical Literature*, Andrews as a young man had expressed a desire to translate Italian poets (“if only I understood the language”) and in fact produced a translation of Manzoni’s *I promessi sposi* in 1834.<sup>7</sup> Catharine Norton, moved by the plight of Italian political refugees, joined her husband in admiration for Silvio Pellico and translated the first volume of his *Le mie prigioni* in 1836.<sup>8</sup> Along with his brother-in-law George Ticknor (1791–1871), the first Smith Professor of Modern Languages at Harvard, Andrews Norton may be said to have established the canonicity of Dante in New England culture.<sup>9</sup> Little remains, unfortunately, that might shed light on his perspective, except for the record of his suggestions—typically in the form of meticulous line-by-line criticism—sent to Thomas W. Parsons (1819–1892), the Boston dentist who commenced a translation of the *Commedia* in the early 1840s and continued to labor at it for most of the century.<sup>10</sup> Charles remembered that “among those who encouraged Dr. Parsons to proceed with his translation, it is pleasant to recall, was my

father; and almost the earliest of my own associations with Dante are connected with the friendly criticism and discussion between him and the young translator.”<sup>11</sup> At Harvard, Norton read Dante with Longfellow (1807–1882), who had succeeded Ticknor in 1836: in 1863, commenting on Longfellow’s translation of the *Paradiso*, Norton wrote that he was “delighted that you, who first taught me to love Dante, should continue to be my master and guide.”<sup>12</sup>

An assumption of Dante’s cultural relevance was therefore in Charles Norton’s bones: his first known reference to the poet occurs in an oration (“among the best exercises both for composition and elocution,” an observer recorded) on the monuments in Santa Croce, delivered on the occasion of his graduation from Harvard in 1846.<sup>13</sup> But surveyed across the whole of his life, Norton’s response to Dante stands out most by alignment with values of personal morality and self-control—“the events of life,” Andrews Norton had admonished his son, were “intended by God for our discipline, for the formation of our characters”—and of social responsibility.<sup>14</sup> The traditional Unitarian emphasis on “self-culture,” awareness gained through intellectual development and issuing in good works, blended easily with the prevailing Victorian earnestness to provide a template for Norton’s identity. Already in his twenties Norton was publishing persuasive essays grounded in a conviction of obligation to one’s fellows. In “Dwellings and Schools for the Poor,” appearing in the *North American Review* in 1852, Norton pleaded for decent housing (he describes the brutalizing conditions of poverty in almost Dickensian detail) and educational reform, as a mandate to municipal authorities but also to the “individual benevolent exertion” incumbent upon Christians: “The relations between man and man are now more fully recognized, the rights of the ignorant and the suffering are now more strongly urged.”<sup>15</sup> In a similar appeal to conscience, Norton’s pamphlet of 1853, *Considerations on Some Recent Social Theories*, rejected contemporary notions of radical democracy (he treats, among others, Kossuth, Mazzini, and Louis Blanc) in favor of “old principles” of “Love, and Truth, and pure Liberty”—liberty defined not as total license, “the heritage of angels, not of men,” but as freedom “from all restraints which may prevent the doing of what is right.” The propagation of these principles throughout the social fabric, in Norton’s view, was up to “the few who have been blessed with the opportunities, and the rare genius, fitting them to lead”:



The trust committed to the hands of the intelligent and the prosperous here is the future of their country. It is for them to provide against the evils which threaten it, by spreading and improving education, by laboring to throw open freely every opportunity for advantages that may be shared by all; by checking every injustice and every corruption; and, above all,—including all,—by endeavoring to carry into daily life and into common actions the spirit of Christianity.<sup>16</sup>

This may suggest an easy paternalism, but Norton stood behind his words: he had opened the first evening school in Boston in 1846, and by 1855 he had financed and seen to construction two “model lodging houses” in Boston’s South Cove.<sup>17</sup> Before he was thirty, in short, Norton had absorbed and claimed for himself a code of integrity and *noblesse oblige* that would decree over time his public support of the abolitionist cause, his fiery opposition to the Spanish-American War, and even, in his later years, his faithful visits to the Cambridge Hospital for Incurables: but education was the keystone of his project.<sup>18</sup> Almost the first of his publications was a commendation, in the *North American* in 1851, of Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy, the first Indian to be knighted by the British Crown, whom Norton had encountered during his visit to India in 1849 (an ultimately aborted *entrée* into the flourishing enterprise of international trade). Jeejeebhoy’s philanthropic munificence had included a hospital, a hostelry, and the construction of a dam and causeway—but also the ordering, in Jeejeebhoy’s own words, of “translations into our language of the most approved authors.” Such benevolence, Norton enjoined, “would be well worthy of imitation, even in our enlightened and liberal community.”<sup>19</sup>

## II

A substantial comment on Dante appears in Norton’s first book, *Notes of Travel and Study in Italy* (1859), the fruit of his tour of Europe in 1855–1857 (he had stopped in England briefly in 1850): with learned reference to the *Convivio* and *De vulgari eloquentia* as well as to the *Commedia*, Norton cites evidence of Dante’s visits to Rome (his reference to the “pine cone of St. Peter’s” and to the events of the Jubilee year), lauds his denunciation of Boniface VIII (“Dante is the unsilenced justiciary of Popes, princes, and people”), and asserts Dante’s distinction between “the Rome of history and prophecy” and the debased city of his own time (“From the real Rome he turned to the Rome of his imagination”).<sup>20</sup> But this is

prologue to Norton's first major contribution to American Dante scholarship, his translation of the *Vita Nuova*. Norton revealed the project first to his mother in 1856: "I have amused myself with beginning a translation of the *Vita Nuova*," he wrote, hoping his work might "preserve the spirit of the original in its simplicity, sweetness, tenderness, & delicacy."<sup>21</sup> Norton reported to his friend the American poet James Russell Lowell (1819–1891) on the first day of 1857 that he had found "some good books" on Dante and added, "I am amusing myself with making a translation of the '*Vita Nuova*.' The more familiar I become with it, the more lovely does it seem to me, and the fuller of an exquisite spirit of tenderness, grace, and simplicity. One can hardly appreciate rightly the '*Divina Commedia*' without knowing this first."<sup>22</sup> Lowell, later to replace Longfellow at Harvard, encouraged Norton to proceed: "I am very glad to hear that you are translating the '*Vita Nuova*.' It is the best possible introduction to a transcendental understanding of the '*Commedia*.' What an extraordinary threefold nature that was of Dante's. The more you study him the more sides you find, and yet the ray from him is always white light."<sup>23</sup> Despite Norton's self-deprecating "I am amusing myself," his project was ambitious: the only available translations of Dante's *libello* in English were the Englishman Charles Lyell's rendering of the work's poems in 1835 and the negligible effort of the American Joseph Garrow, printed obscurely in Florence in 1846 (Norton did not know of the version Emerson had drafted, which lay unpublished until the twentieth century).<sup>24</sup>

Yet by the mid-1850s the *Vita Nuova* was a text ripe for retrieval. As Steve Ellis recounts in his survey *Dante and English Poetry*, the 1830s had seen the emergence of a "cult of Beatrice" highly congenial to Victorian constructions of femininity.<sup>25</sup> Arthur Hallam was evidently the first to attempt an English translation; a full translation by Theodore Martin would appear in 1863. For the most part, however, the visibility of the *Vita Nuova* in mid-century Anglo-American culture radiated from the poems and paintings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882), whose work Norton saw at an exhibit of Pre-Raphaelite art in London in 1857. "Rossetti's are the best," Norton told his mother (July 2),

for in force and beauty of colour he stands above the others, and also in depth and delicacy of imaginative power. Among his pictures are . . . the picture of Dante's vision at the time of the death of Beatrice, and a companion piece to

this, the anniversary of the death of Beatrice, representing Dante becoming aware of the presence of persons who had been watching him as he drew an angel upon certain tablets. . . .<sup>26</sup>

John Ruskin (1819–1900), who had met Norton in 1856 and became his intimate friend and collaborator in the cause of aesthetic discrimination, bought Rossetti's painting *Beatrice at a Marriage Feast Denying Her Salutation to Dante* and sent it to Norton (May 15, 1860): "It was a really nice chance his having done that subject it came so pat for your *Vita*."<sup>27</sup>

Norton had been introduced to Rossetti by Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning in the same year he met Ruskin, and, on learning that Rossetti too was drafting a translation of the poems of the *Vita Nuova*, ultimately published in his volume *The Early Italian Poets* (1861), Norton held back his own translation but told Lowell he wished to "print some parts of it . . . so that the independent work I gave it may be plain."<sup>28</sup> Excerpts from Norton's version appeared in three installments of the recently founded *Atlantic Monthly* in 1859, embedded in a biographical and historical exposition of the work's context and providing long tracts of plot summary for an uninitiated readership.<sup>29</sup> After the obligatory disclaimer (the *Vita Nuova*, Norton acknowledges, is "quaint, embroidered with conceits, deficient in artistic completeness" [1.62]), Norton takes care to assert the reality of Beatrice—"She is no allegorized piece of humanity, no impersonation of attributes, but an actual woman" (1.63)—and expresses a view (1.66) to which he would often return, of the thirteenth century as an era throwing off the restraints of the past: "The secret of the active power of the arts at this time was the conscious or unconscious resort of those who practised them to the springs of Nature, from which the streams of all true Art proceed" ("truth to nature" was a principle articulated by Ruskin in his 1843 book *Modern Painters*, which Norton knew).<sup>30</sup> Poised in this felicitous historical moment, Dante was "the first of the moderns to seek Poetry" in Nature "and to free her from the chains of conventionality which had long bound her" (1.66): and the *Vita Nuova* is hence "the first of that series of works in which truth, intensity, and tenderness of feeling are displayed as in the writings of no other man" (2.202). Dante's sincerity, Norton promises, ensures the endurance of the *Vita Nuova* into the future: "So long as there are lovers in the world, and so long as lovers are poets, so long will this first and tenderest love-story of modern literature be read with appreciation and responsive sympathy" (1.62).

Given the rigorous critical scholarship generated since his time, Norton's statements may strike us as distinctly unremarkable. It should not be overlooked, however, that the *Atlantic* essays already present what was to become the hallmark theme of Norton's commentary, the character-building aspects of Dante's personal history. Early expressions of the Dante revival, particularly the various "lives" then in circulation, had of course drawn attention to the poet's temperament, particularly his "disposition to sarcasm," as Cary notes, and his supposed vindictiveness: so much so that Ugo Foscolo, in his influential essay in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1818, was at pains "to prove that [Dante's] heart was as much distinguished for gentleness, as for magnanimity and force."<sup>31</sup> But Norton projects a Dante not simply uncorrupted by Byronic animus but frank and free in the Victorian style, inspired by the innocent love of his youth to a life of sustained dignity and moral valor. "Nothing is better or more commonly known about Dante than his love for Beatrice," Norton acknowledges,

but the course of that love, its relation to his external and public life, its moulding effect upon his character, have not been clearly traced. The love which lasted from his boyhood to his death, keeping his heart fresh, spite of the scorings of disappointment, with springs of perpetual solace,—the love which, purified and spiritualized by the bitterness of separation and trial, led him through the hard paths of Philosophy and up the steep ascents of Faith, bringing him out of Hell and through Purgatory to the glories of Paradise, the fulfillment of Hope,—such a love is not only a spiritual experience, but is also the discipline of character whose results are exhibited in the continually renewed struggles of life. (1.62)

In the March installment, moreover, we find the first instance of what probably sets Norton's reception of Dante most conspicuously apart from that of most of his contemporaries: his marked attraction to the *Convivio* (or, in the title preferred by Norton, the *Convito*), a frequently marginalized text that nevertheless, Norton asserts, "affords new insights into the recesses of Dante's heart" (3.335) as his memory of Beatrice followed him from youth to maturity.<sup>32</sup> The *opere minori* of Dante, as Norton surely noticed, also emphasize his identity as a public man, civic-minded and solicitous toward all classes: and the governing image of the *Convivio*, the "bread of the angels"—the knowledge to be distributed in compassion by those "who are fed at so lofty a table"—was one to which Norton would repeatedly return.<sup>33</sup> As he pointed out in a much later essay, "The *Convito* derives its name of 'the Banquet' from its main design, which was that of

providing instruction which should be serviceable in the conduct of life, for those who have scant opportunities of learning.”<sup>34</sup> The line encapsulates Norton’s own agenda—the education by the privileged of those less fortunate. Even as the youthful composer of the *Vita Nuova*, Norton insists in the last of his *Atlantic* articles, Dante “was no lovesick idler, no mere home-keeping writer of verses, but was already taking his part in the affairs of state on which he was afterwards to be called on for a time to assist in governing, and he was laying up those stores of experience which were to serve as the material out of which his vivifying imagination was to form the great national poem of Italy” (3.330). Despite its presumptive simplicity, the *Vita Nuova* anticipated the depth of character to be found in the *Commedia* and disclosed the impetus for a life of service.

### III

A hundred copies of Norton’s *New Life of Dante Alighieri* were printed for private circulation in 1859. The volume comprised Norton’s slightly modified *Atlantic* essays, with passages of translation expanded, and three appended studies: “Date of the Composition of the *Vita Nuova*” (Norton fixes the year as 1292 but assumes incorporation of later material); “Structure of the *Vita Nuova*,” asserting Dante’s symmetrical placement of the work’s poems in three groups of ten around a central *canzone*; and “Inconsistency of Statements in the *Convito* with those of the *Vita Nuova*,” addressing again the date of text but exploring as well the problem of the *donna gentile*.<sup>35</sup> Norton had “left unsaid many things that are suggested to one who reads carefully,” he explained, “because this volume is only for those *che sanno con prudenza Amor sequire*”; he himself, he acknowledged, had “found in the *Vita Nuova* a source not only of pleasure, but of invigoration in seasons of languor and disappointment. It is a doorway to a cathedral into which no one can enter without having his spirit elevated and purified by its sacred influences.”<sup>36</sup> Norton’s book was received with enthusiasm by his friends: Parsons even penned an apostrophic poem beginning, “Norton, whose name is numbered on the scroll / Of sacred scholars.”<sup>37</sup> The novelist Elizabeth Gaskell, whom Norton had met in Rome in 1857, wrote on April 5, 1860: “There now, I jump away . . . to my beautiful *Vita Nuova*, which only came yesterday, but which was more identified with *you*, and Italy than anything else, and

which I have so much wished to have of my own, and in print, ever since you let me read it in MS. Thank you so *very* much for it. I do so value it.”<sup>38</sup> Ruskin gushed a month later (May 5), “You cannot at all imagine how much good your affectionate letters have done me; nor less your noble book: the essay on the Vita.”<sup>39</sup> This approval might have been enough to encourage Norton to further Dante activity, but the momentum of his interest was accelerated by news of the international sexcentenary of Dante’s birth. “Go to the Nortons’ this morning,” Longfellow wrote in his journal for April 30, 1863. “Found Charles there alone. He tells me that in 1865 the six-hundredth birthday of Dante is to be celebrated in Florence; and wants me to keep back my translation of the ‘Divina Commedia’”—the translation Longfellow had resumed in 1862 after the death of his wife the previous year—“for that occasion.”<sup>40</sup> Longfellow finished his translation of the *Inferno* in good time, sending the scarlet-bound volume to Florence in company with Parsons’s *Seventeen Cantos of the Inferno* and Norton’s contribution, *On the Original Portraits of Dante*—an impressionistic response to the recently recovered portrait in the Bargello Palace in Florence, attributed to Giotto and believed to depict Dante as a young man, and to the putative death mask of Dante, then the subject of widespread attention.<sup>41</sup> “Parsons, yourself, Lowell, and I,” Norton told Longfellow in 1865, “are, I believe, the only American writers who have done anything worth mention or preservation in Dantesque literature.”<sup>42</sup>

The excitement of international recognition for American “Dantesque literature” stimulated Norton to other projects. In 1866, on the urging of Longfellow, he began translating the *Convivio*, asking Longfellow “if he would pledge to do the difficult Canzoni.”<sup>43</sup> Longfellow’s postponement apparently kept this translation from completion, but “I have been revising my ‘Vita Nuova,’” Norton told Lowell in 1866 (October 19), “and my hope is to have it in type soon, and then to have some pleasant readings with Longfellow and you”—gatherings that took place on Saturday evenings at Shady Hill.<sup>44</sup> Norton’s *The New Life of Dante Alighieri*, this time a complete translation of the *Vita Nuova*, was issued by Ticknor and Fields in 1867 to complement the Longfellow *Commedia*. Accompanying the translation was the paratextual material first printed in 1859, but with some revision and reconfiguration: “On the New Life,” a modified version of the January installment of Norton’s *Atlantic* contribution; “On the Date of the Composition of the *Vita Nuova*,” which reconsiders and

attempts to reconcile contradictions between the *Vita Nuova* and the *Convivio*; and again "On the Structure of the *Vita Nuova*." Now entering his forties, Norton was taking his place as one of America's premiere Dante scholars. Yet it is also evident that Norton's contemplation of Dante in these years continued to reach beyond the scholarly and aesthetic. In *On the Original Portraits*, for example, Norton's meditation on Dante's death mask conveys a newly reverential appreciation for the poet's character:

The face is one of the most pathetic upon which human eyes ever looked, for it exhibits in its expression the conflict between the strong nature of the man and the hard dealings of fortune,—between the idea of his life and its practical experience. Strength is the most striking attribute of the countenance, displayed alike in the broad forehead, the masculine nose, the firm lips, the heavy jaw and wide chin; and this strength, resulting from the main forms of the features, is enforced by the strength of the lines of expression. The look is grave and stern almost to grimness; there is a scornful lift to the eyebrow, and a contraction of the forehead as from painful thought; but obscured under this look, yet not lost, are the marks of tenderness, refinement, and self-mastery, which, in combination with the more obvious characteristics, give to the countenance of the dead poet an ineffable dignity and melancholy. There is neither weakness nor failure here. It is the image of the strong fortress of a strong soul "buttressed on conscience and impregnable will," battered by the blows of enemies without and within, bearing upon its walls the dint of many a siege, but standing firm and unshaken against all attacks until the warfare was at an end.<sup>45</sup>

The passage clearly owes something to Carlyle's disquisition on Dante's physiognomy in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1840), but it implicitly modifies the "abnegation, isolation, and proud hopeless pain" of Carlyle's "wandering, sorrowstricken" exile; however battered, Norton's Dante is no self-dramatizing *tragediente*.<sup>46</sup> In 1874 (January 19) Norton would urge Lowell, then in Europe, to secure a cast of the death mask from Seymour Kirkup, the eccentric (and by then aged) Englishman whose sketch of the Bargello image, reproduced by the Arundel Society in 1841, was finding its way into many domestic interiors. "It is the best and most authentic of the copies from the original mask, and I wish I could get hold of it," Norton told Lowell. "I have, as you know, a cast from it, as well as one from the Torrigiani cast, now in the Uffizi. Its superiority to the Torrigiani cast, and to the bronze cast at Naples, is manifest. . . . I would give any reasonable sum for it. It would be a treasure worth having in America."<sup>47</sup>

Norton's assurance of the mask's authenticity belies a wish for worshipful and tactile connection, for a relic only one degree removed from Dante's face—perhaps because Norton's need for an authorizing model had become particularly immediate. Coming of age in years when much of New England was abandoning its inherited Calvinism in favor of a less dogmatic Unitarianism, Norton by the mid-1860s had moved so far to the left that even Unitarianism threatened confinement. As he explained to Elizabeth Gaskell's daughter Meta in 1867 (July 14),

So far as [Unitarianism] stands for liberalism in theology and as a protest against dogma and creed, it seems to me to have nearly done its work. It is in danger of becoming itself a dogma, and of hardening into a church as exclusive as any other. . . . The deepest religious thought, the wisest religious life outside of Unitarianism at present, is not to be found, indeed, within the limit of any churches. I cannot but think that our present church organization and services are in many, and essential, respects out of date. . . . Having established as a fundamental right, the right of private judgment, and the utmost liberty of individual opinion, we can no longer unite men in a religious association based on conformity of doctrine. We must have a free Church, to which all who belong are seeking the highest and best they know, and are trying to express their highest convictions in life, may come and be welcomed on equal terms, whether they call themselves Unitarians or Trinitarians, Christians or unbelievers. I look to see a church arise which shall be a natural human brotherhood, for the sake of promoting religious life and securing by common effort and action, ends which as individuals its members would be unable to effect. It will be the glory of Unitarianism to have been the last step of the ascending series by which men reached at last the platform of the true Church Universal.<sup>48</sup>

The evolution in Norton's beliefs is intimated already by a line added to the first essay in his 1867 edition of *The New Life*: "Old and authoritative systems were discarded."<sup>49</sup> The sentence probably reflects Norton's concurrent excitement at the founding of the *Nation*, conceived as the voice of postwar liberalism, and it heralds the articulation of his religious views in two articles for the *North American Review*.<sup>50</sup> In "Religious Liberty" (1867), he points to the concurrent breakdown in "the authority of the old churches" and its accompanying effects as "really the signs of religious life,—signs that the fundamental doctrine of all true religion, that of the responsibility of the individual to himself alone for his opinions, of the utter freedom of individual opinion, is gaining possession of the minds of men." Incorporating long passages from the writings of Ruskin and John



Stuart Mill, Norton's essay ultimately defines "religion" as "a man's devotion,—that is, the complete assent and concentration of his will,—to any object which he acknowledges to have a right to his entire service, and to supreme control over his life." Such a concept, Norton insists, permits all benevolent persons to "union in mutual charity, confidence, and help,—for common labor in the endless work to advance mankind in virtue and happiness."<sup>51</sup> Incited in part by the repressive papal encyclical *Quanta Cura*, distributed by Pius IX in 1864, "The Church and Religion" (1868) identifies the advance of science and political liberty as contributing factors to ecclesiastical decline—but claims that the open-minded tolerance of "free-thinkers" promotes "the grace of charity as the best expression and proof of liberty."<sup>52</sup>

Norton had long been interested in the relation between creed and social action, particularly as the first might paradoxically inhibit the second: he had speculated, in fact, that the attenuation of Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy's Parsee heritage had even fostered his charities, since the "religion of the Parsees . . . has so little influence on them, and has so little to do with their daily concerns, that they are not deprived by it of the free exercise of their intelligence . . . the holy springs of natural affection and sympathy are left to flow unchecked."<sup>53</sup> "There is nothing so cruel as the heart that thinks itself one with God," Norton would observe to Ruskin in 1870 (March 31). "For charity's sake, for love's sake, for friendliness's sake I would not believe in the God of the good. Let us love & serve one another, let us be faithful to each other, tender, loving, considerate,—& then God will love us,—that is, then we shall have obtained the best that can be."<sup>54</sup> But what of Dante, whose *Commedia* would seem a consummation of medieval theology? Norton's entrenched admiration for Dante, and his confidence, grounded in the *Convivio*, in the poet's will to do good work in the world, combined to protect Dante's role as spiritual progenitor. In his essay "Dante, and His Latest English Translators," published in the *North American* in 1866 in anticipation of Longfellow's version, Norton insists that Dante's faith "was deeper, more imaginative, and more controlling than that of other men. When inquiry had begun to investigate the causes and sequences of things with fresh and ardent activity, he pushed out farther into the unknown world, and caught stronger hold of truth than any other questioner, his predecessor or contemporary." And although he may have accepted the teachings of the Church, Dante

took the material conceptions which the Church afforded to her children, and clothed upon them his own spiritual imaginations. He reverently received the husks of a false creed, and changed them by the miracle of faith into the pure wheat of truth. He gave to mankind the most vigorous realization of the Romish hell and heaven, but he used this material groundwork as the foundation of a spiritual structure. The first heaven and the first earth passed away, and he saw a new heaven and a new earth.<sup>55</sup>

The extent to which Norton associated the work of Dante with his own manifestly (if modestly) utopian vision is indicated in a document preserved from his residence in England in 1869, when Norton—"fresh from the idealism and cooperation of postwar America," in Dowling's words, but appalled by the unspeakable poverty around him—found himself next to a young Englishwoman, Mary Acland, at a sumptuous banquet; Acland was so inspired by their conversation that she recorded it in her diary (April 28).<sup>56</sup> After telling her that "of the 21 million population of England, 18 million, taken on an average, have but 1/ a day," Norton expressed his opinion that "the only chance of a peaceable social reform" lay in "the progress of education." As Acland recounts her impression,

This was a very noble talk, & riveted my whole attention. How quietly he said "I sit here, I enjoy talking to you, I am not responsible for the expense lavished on this dinner—I go home—the light of my carriage will fall on dark forms of misery and poverty in the streets—it must fall on them, it must strike as a terrible contrast. Now I would have this thought, which must strike every one, not stifled but *enduring, abiding, living* with men, as a principle of action."

In a telling juxtaposition, Norton next asked about her reading:

Then he slowly said "You have not read Dante." and went on . . . making me long to know Dante well—"It is one of the few books—there are but few, not more than five or six—which are worth imbibing into one's very soul. You must read it through and through, you must not stop at the end of the 'Purgatorio,' and say 'What could that Mr Norton mean by the admiration he told me to feel for this hard man'; no, you must go in till you have been launched out into that grand period of the middle ages, till you understand how it was the visible things were less real, less materialistic to Dante than the things of his Vision, till you can picture that man led up in the pure childlike earnest faith of his time, and enter into his mind, and be taught by him all that he can teach to the present age, when such great changes are coming upon us in religion as in social life, when a religion is developing itself—a religion I trust grander, nobler, purer than that of Dante."

But cultural apotheosis might presage cultural decline. "The Divina Commedia is not only the crown of the religious achievement of Italy," Norton worried to Ruskin to 1872 (December 29), "but its close. It opens the way to scepticism,—& Petrarch comes sentimentally dawdling, & Boccaccio jesting, down the road, with the whole tribe of unbelievers behind them. Faith gets shut up in a cloister with Fra Angelico while Lippi and Botticelli are already happy pilgrims not to Rome, but to a new Jerusalem within whose walls lies the sacred Hill of Venus."<sup>57</sup> Without the discipline of religion, how was morality to be inculcated? "Why should not we all have been made good & happy," Norton asked Ruskin in 1869 (August 4) after his little daughter had complained that it was "*so hard*" to be good.<sup>58</sup> And a few months later (October 8) Norton laid the problem out bluntly to his English friend:

Well, now the point is, what education in these matters ought I to give my children? . . . Many men who believe as little as I, leave the education of their children to the women who believe in the old doctrine,—but this is a cowardly shirking of responsibility. Yet I feel that in allowing my children to grow up without acquiring the usual *sentiment* with regard to God, to Christ, to immortality . . . is in some respects a new experiment. Can I give them strong enough moral conceptions, without connecting these conceptions to religious sanctions, to make them strong against temptation, to develop upright, & virtuous characters?<sup>59</sup>

#### IV

Norton had married Susan Ridley Sedgwick in 1862: the couple would have six children. Announcing his engagement in a letter to Gaskell (March 4), Norton praised Susan's character as "matured by long discipline" and proclaimed her to be "a woman whom everybody loves."<sup>60</sup> Congratulating him in return (April 22), Gaskell confided her intuition that "of all the men I ever knew you were not only the one to best appreciate woman; but also, (which is very probably the other side of what I have just said) the one to require along with your masculine friendships, sympathetic companionship of a good gracious woman."<sup>61</sup> Even taking into account the Victorian tendency to sentimentalize marriage, the Nortons' union seems to have been particularly happy: Norton referred to marriage as "the only experience of life in which the best ideal falls short of the real."<sup>62</sup> With Susan's death in Dresden in February of

1872, Norton's "ten years of exceptional happiness" abruptly ended.<sup>63</sup> In deference to conventional decorum, he destroyed Susan's letters—"I have burned some of the sweetest love letters ever penned, because I would make sure that no eye but mine should ever see them"<sup>64</sup>—but the authenticity of their relationship is suggested by, for example, this note to Ruskin of May 4, 1874: "One of the best days in my life was one I spent with Susan at Assisi just four years ago. She cared as much & knew as much as I, & felt deeper than I, about all that was best in Giotto, & she was so happy in the old town, & in our sunset walk to the *castello*."<sup>65</sup> When he received Ruskin's letter from Lucca later the same year (August 30), Norton remembered, "Five years ago I was there with Susan. . . . The hardest thing about living is the tyranny of the present. When one would hold the past closest to one's heart the present tears it away."<sup>66</sup>

After spelling out his hope for social progress, Norton had urged Mary Acland to read the *Vita Nuova* in Rossetti's version: "All the history of Dante's early love, how he loved and how he devoted his life to her image, and she became the inspiration of his greater poem. . . . Dante was a man in whom all the qualities which a pure woman would love and honour were most fully developed." Considering the depth of his involvement with the *Vita Nuova*, one is of course tempted to look for traces of the text in the residue of Norton's marriage: though his essays for the *Atlantic* had appeared before he courted Susan, it can hardly be coincidence that their betrothal followed her participation in informal discussions of the *Paradiso* Norton was conducting at Shady Hill. Ruskin, appropriately, sent the couple a rare edition of the *Commedia* as a wedding gift. More than a year after Susan's death, Norton told Carlyle (November 16, 1873), "I have not read [John Stuart] Mill's 'Autobiography.' One who knows anything of the 'Vita Nuova' and of the 'Divine Comedy' may be pardoned if he smile compassionately at poor Mill's experience of love."<sup>67</sup> Susan's eager response to Europe, Norton wrote to his friend Francis Child, had "enlarged all her resources of giving and receiving happiness—and had she come home with us you would have found her with all her youthful freshness of spirit undiminished, but with a fullness and richness of maturity added to it such as few women have the character to maintain"; his family would sorrow for him, Norton knew, but "you must think of me always as feeling through and through my heart that I have been blessed with a blessing that endures . . . and consequently able

to find help in the days.”<sup>68</sup> Norton’s diction here, the word “blessed” and his reference to Susan’s giving happiness, could hardly have failed to bring to mind, in his own words, “the meaning of the name Beatrice—*She who renders happy, She who blesses*.”<sup>69</sup> Dowling too is moved to invoke Dante in regard to the Norton’s achievement of companionate wedlock: “In the *Vita Nuova* of a perfected marriage,” she observes, “there lay the power to be and do good . . . a moral source, shaping character, giving strength to right purpose, and helping others . . . therefore entirely distinct from the selfishness of common love.”<sup>70</sup> Norton himself advised a student in 1899 (April 10) that “the service which a man may render to his fellows will depend largely upon the woman whom he loves. A true wife more than doubles her husband’s virtues and power. Love is the fulfilling of life.”<sup>71</sup>

In an affecting coincidence, in the months following Susan’s death Norton visited and was in correspondence with the German Dantist Karl Witte (1800–1883), then preparing his own edition of the *Vita Nuova*. In November of 1872, as he set down in his diary, Norton went to the Bodleian Library to scout out some “mss. of the *Vita Nuova* for old Witte.” “Read the early sheets of the edition of the *Vita Nuova* that Witte had sent me,” Norton wrote in the anniversary month of Susan’s death (February 7, 1873), “& found good more than ever in the little book”: the next page of the diary is inscribed with lines from Dante’s work, “Morte villana”—“Discourteous Death,” in Norton’s translation—and “Amor non già.”<sup>72</sup> If the *Vita Nuova* had enriched Norton’s love for Susan, her demise left him to re-enact the darker phase of Dante’s scenario, the pit of grief. Yet the work also invited a further *imitatio*, the sublimation of earthly love into spiritual inspiration, of Beatrice into beatitude. Dowling infers that for the widowed Norton Susan’s memory transfigured into what he himself called “the secret treasure of my life.”<sup>73</sup> One cannot look into Norton’s soul, but the historian Barrett Wendell, one of Norton’s students, records this tantalizing fragment of a conversation he had with Lowell during his Harvard years (1873–1877), the period immediately following Norton’s loss. “There is one blessed comfort,” Lowell said, “that comes with death; then, at last, we can begin, with certainty of no awakening disenchantment, to idealize those we love. It is the dead, unbodied Beatrice that lives forever in the lines of Dante. We can watch among our friends the growth of their own Beatrices that such

as have had the happiness to know them make amid the agonies of bereavement, each for himself.”<sup>74</sup>

I venture to propose, therefore, that the essay Norton published in editions of his *New Life of Dante Alighieri* in the 1890s and again in 1902, though largely a reorganization of earlier material, reveals a subtextual coming to terms with Susan’s death and the program for a renewal of life—in a sense yet another “vita nuova.” Titled simply “The *Convito* and the *Vita Nuova*,” the essay revisits the relation between the two works and resolves the question of whether Dante’s turning to the *donna gentile* of Philosophy constituted infidelity to the memory of Beatrice—whose “death had plunged him into a grief which derived no consolation from spiritual comforts.”

In his sorrow he at length turned himself to such sources of comfort as he could find in study, and seeking silver, he found gold. For the acquisition of knowledge gradually opened to him the way to wisdom. And in this aspect she [Philosophy] became hateful to him. Then Beatrice revealed herself in vision to him no longer merely as a type of heavenly things, but as herself a guide to the knowledge of them, herself the revealer of Divine truth. She, looking upon the face of God, reflected its light upon her lover. She became the image of Divine Philosophy.<sup>75</sup>

Like that of Beatrice for Dante, Susan’s place in Norton’s memory might be figural: at once her human self and an icon of intensely private and sustaining spiritual force.<sup>76</sup> The *Vita Nuova* retained its consolations into Norton’s later years: in a note to his 1892 reissue he confided “feeling the charm of the original no less in my age than in my youth,” and in the same year (January 12) he tried to coax Houghton, Mifflin into producing “a small, exquisite edition of the original text and [Norton’s] translation, without any body of notes, as a book for lovers.”<sup>77</sup> When the English Dante scholar Edward Moore lost his wife in 1908, Norton expressed the hope (January 1) that Moore would “devote more time to his favourite studies, for in them I believe he would find that occupation of thought and that steadying of mind which is needful after a great calamity. . . . No studies are better fitted to do this than studies of Dante.”<sup>78</sup> Time does not heal wounds, he wrote to another English Dantist, William Warren Vernon, in 1907 (September 9), but (in a direct reversal of Francesca’s statement in *Inf.* 5) “joy in the memories of past happiness becomes more and more efficient as an element to secure peace and tranquillity of soul.”<sup>79</sup>

V

In the aftermath of Susan's death, accordingly, Norton entered his most productive phase, a thirty-five-year career of distinguished cultural leadership during which his name and that of Dante became nearly inseparable. In 1873 Norton's cousin Charles William Eliot, President of Harvard since 1869, appointed him to teach the fine arts; in friendly negotiation with Lowell, then on a leave of absence, Norton began taking over instruction in Dante a few years later.<sup>80</sup> The testimony of one of his students, that Norton "read Dante with such affectionate reverence that undisciplined youths who customarily spent lecture periods carving initials into classroom furniture slipped away at the end of the hour and bought all of Dante's works," may exaggerate; another Harvard alumnus remembered the fire escape outside Massachusetts Hall as "black with students retiring from Charles Eliot Norton's course in the fine arts" once Norton had taken the roll.<sup>81</sup> But it is clear that Norton enjoyed his teaching, especially when the classes took place in his library at Shady Hill. He had a class of "young graduates and Seniors—eight in all," he reported to Lowell in 1879 (February 24), "with whom on Tuesday evenings I read Dante. It is interesting work, for they are a picked set, and full of fresh interest and zeal in the study. By the end of the year we shall have read the whole 'Divine Comedy,' and there will be eight more lovers of Dante in the land. In the ideal University I should like to be Professor of Dante."<sup>82</sup> A letter had been interrupted one night, he apologized to Ruskin in 1882 (December 16), "by the coming in of three students with whom I had a long talk on Dante, on Holbein, on what Europe may do for an American, &, at last, on what life was to be lived for! Ingenuous youth, full of good thoughts & aims,—& on the whole a better race, more manly & with larger outlook, than their predecessors of thirty years ago."<sup>83</sup> The Dante Society, though traceable to the Wednesday night "Dante Club" meetings held at Longfellow's house from 1865 to 1867 to revise his translation, was proposed in fact by students. As Norton recalled in a letter to his former student William Roscoe Thayer, then the editor of the *Harvard Graduates' Magazine*,

It was, I think, in 1880 that some members of the class which I was conducting in *The Divine Comedy*, hearing me speak of the possible service which a club for the promotion of Dante studies might render, came to me to say that they wished such a club might be founded, and would be glad to do what might be

in their power to give it a good start. . . . I told them that I thought the success of the effort would depend on whether Mr. Longfellow would consent to take the presidency of the proposed society, and that I would consult with him about it.<sup>84</sup>

“Tonight I go to Longfellow’s to attend the first meeting of the Dante Club, of which he has consented to be President,” Norton wrote to Lowell on February 11, 1881. He could not predict the impact of the organization, he admitted, “beyond the cherishing of the love and honour of the poet in the lives of the better class of students of a generation younger than our own,” but “this is enough.”<sup>85</sup>

For the opportunity to teach realized for Norton his long-held confidence in the redemptive effects of a humanistic education: he wanted to become a professor, he told Ruskin (January 10, 1874) shortly before his appointment, so that he could “be brought into close relations with youths whom I can try to inspire with love of things that make life beautiful, & generous.”<sup>86</sup> The question he had posed to Ruskin, of how morality might be perpetuated outside religion, found its answer in Norton’s continued location of the impulse to altruism in art and literature. James Geddes, who studied with Norton in the 1880s, remembered Norton’s dictum that “the cultivation of the imagination” derived from Dante brought “men into sympathy with one another, and sympathy is one of the great ends of life”; the composer Daniel Gregory Mason, Norton’s student in the 1890s, noted in his journal (October 2, 1894), “Norton insisted on the immense importance to humanity of the sense of social responsibility. . . . Through a sense of responsibility to our fellows . . . we shall seek for that widened sympathy and cultivation of mind which is the real gift of education, infinitely more important than the collection of facts.”<sup>87</sup> T.S. Eliot, speaking in 1932 as the Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry at Harvard, rightly attributed to Norton “the moral and spiritual qualities of a stoic kind, which are possible without the benefits of revealed religion,” and some scholars have suspected a wistfulness in Norton’s turn to Dante, a nostalgia for lost authority.<sup>88</sup> But Norton’s dedication to the spread of learning, authoritatively endorsed for him by the *Convivio* and harking back to his work with the night schools in the 1840s, shows on examination an invigorating sense of purpose, the exhilaration of a forward-looking crusade. References to Dante pepper his magnum opus, *Historical Studies of Church-Building in the Middle Ages* (1880), and a



whole other study might be undertaken on parallels between Norton's Dante researches and his expertise in art and architecture: it pleased him, obviously, to think that Dante and Giotto were friends, and he was noticeably fond of citing Dante's reference to "il mio bel San Giovanni" (*Inf.* 12.21), the baptistery he had of course seen for himself.<sup>89</sup> Norton's primary achievement, however, and his most influential contribution to the advance of Dante in America, is no doubt his translation of the *Commedia*, issued first in 1891–1892 (with a revised edition of his *Vita Nuova* as an accompaniment) and revised in 1902. Norton's introduction is admirably concise, but it permits him a platform for the tenets to which he was wedded: the science of Dante's era might be obsolete, he points out, but human nature is constant—and thus "the moral judgments of a great poet whose imagination penetrates to the core of things, and who, from his very nature as poet, conceives and sets forth the issues of life . . . by means of sensible types and images, never lose interest, and have a perpetual contemporaneousness." The "corner-stone of Dante's moral system," moreover, was Norton's own absolute, "the Freedom of the Will; in other words, the right of private judgment with the condition of accountability. This is the liberty which Dante, that is man, goes seeking in his journey through the spiritual world."<sup>90</sup>

The translation, Norton set down in a prefatory note, was "intended primarily for two classes of readers: first, for those who, unable to read the *Divine Comedy* in the original, desire to obtain knowledge of its contents; second, for those who, with more or less acquaintance with the Italian, undertake to read the poem in its original tongue, and need help in interpretation" (v). Norton's sense of audience also dictated that his translation should be in prose. Though a poetic version would have vied too obviously with Longfellow's—"the most faithful version of Dante that has ever been made"—Norton's choice of a prose medium was impelled by more than filial deference.<sup>91</sup> Dante in prose, in a sense the same descent to the vernacular elected by the master, assured a wider, even plebeian readership: it was regrettable, Norton had observed in 1884, that, put off by "an exaggerated idea of the obscurity of the poem," "there are comparatively few who have read, even in translation, anything but extracts from the world-famed trilogy."<sup>92</sup> As he had dropped the affected archaism of his 1867 *Vita Nuova*—the artificially biblical "sayeth" and "dwelleth" and "in this wise" advised by Lowell<sup>93</sup>—for the 1892

reissue, Norton's *Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri* proceeds in a straightforward plain style:

Midway upon the journey of our life I found myself in a dark wood, where the right way was lost. Ah! how hard a thing it is to tell what this wild and rough and difficult wood was, which in thought renews my fear! So bitter it is that death is little more. But in order to treat of the good I found in it, I will tell of the other things that I saw there. (1)

Diction was crucial—particularly since, as Norton had noted in a review of Longfellow's version, "No poet suffers more from the amplification of a poor translator than Dante; for there is none more uniformly concise and choice in his expression."<sup>94</sup> Norton acknowledges in the introduction to his own translation that the "coalescence of the music and the meaning" of Dante's verse "cannot be transferred from one tongue to another" (1), so that Dante's rhyme—"we may, speaking broadly, say it never forced Dante to use a word he would not otherwise have chosen," as he had written elsewhere—could hardly be attempted in English.<sup>95</sup> His own aim, Norton states, "has been to follow the words of Dante as closely as our English idiom allows, and thus to give the reader the substance of the poem as little altered as possible" (x). The procession of reviews of other Dante translations habitually assigned to Norton from the 1860s on supply additional data for his personal standard. In the Cary version, he judged, Dante's "strangeness to the English mind was smoothed away. . . . he was accepted with that sort of half sympathy which is accorded to a foreigner who has taken out his papers of naturalization"; Parsons, attempting to "reproduce an ineffable, inexpressible beauty," failed in accuracy; Rossetti "has sometimes turned the wild rose of the Italian field into the rose of the English hothouse"; Plumptre's attempt at *terza rima* "is no longer the pulse of life, but a mere mechanical beat"; Wicksteed "not infrequently misrepresents the character of Dante's diction by the choice of a word too forcible, or too unusual, or too specific, as a rendering for the simple term of the original."<sup>96</sup>

Turner's biography reports that "Houghton Mifflin kept the *Divine Comedy* imprint in its original three-volume format through 1928, then as a one-volume school edition from 1941 to 1958. . . . In the 1950s, Encyclopedia Britannica chose Norton's version for its series, Great Books of the Western World; other reprints appeared into the second half of the twentieth century." As Turner comments, "This durability bespeaks both

the exactness and the fluency of the translation, and these qualities in turn resulted from Norton's careful scholarship and his minute attention to language."<sup>97</sup> An adequate translation, however, was only a start. In *The Making of Middlebrow Culture*, Joan Shelley Rubin attributes the broad educational enterprise of the late nineteenth century to the reforming instincts of the Unitarianism into which Norton was born and which continued to shape high culture from the citadel of Harvard: impelled by a derivative faith in social amelioration through education, the Gilded Age founded museums, opera houses, great libraries, and a proliferation of colleges and universities.<sup>98</sup> Supplementing these institutions was a complex of related activities often modeled on New England traditions: lyceums, public lectures, literary societies, reading groups. Norton himself, of course, had always accommodated a range of potential Dante enthusiasts outside his Harvard classes: in 1878, for example, Longfellow noticed that "Charles Norton is reading Dante to a class of ladies at the new Hawthorne Rooms in Park Street."<sup>99</sup> In March of 1894, by now a "stoop-shouldered, husky-voiced, but supremely urbane and gentle presence," Norton inaugurated the Turnbull lectures at Johns Hopkins University (repeating them in Cambridge the following spring to overflow crowds).<sup>100</sup> The structure of the series (which remains in manuscript) is uncomplicated: a general introduction, an introduction to the *Vita Nuova*, an analysis of Dante's world view with particular reference to the *Convivio*, then separate treatments of *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*. Composing the six lectures, Norton admitted to Sir Leslie Stephen (March 13, 1894), was "a hard and altogether unsatisfactory job," and a good deal of their substance is rather tedious plot summary, interspersed with long quotations.<sup>101</sup> But Norton was alert to the challenge of the occasion, the chance to reach a wide and diverse audience whose knowledge of Dante was at best rudimentary. "There is a curious interest felt in Dante among the half educated in this country," he wrote to Lord Vernon upon his return from Baltimore. "I hardly know what to ascribe it to, except the vague desire for what is called 'culture'; but it may be that some of it springs from the contrast of his faith to the prevalent lack of faith in the old creeds. Men and women who have lost faith rejoice in a confident believer. . . ."<sup>102</sup>

In his opening remarks, therefore, Norton proposes two causes for the current attention to Dante, "one of the characteristic features of such intellectual life as exists among us":

The first of these is the materialism of our existing state of civilization against which the study of the poets is a partial reaction; and the second is the general dissolution of the old forms of religious faith, which has led vast numbers of serious thinking persons to new and often bewildered and uncertain speculations as to the relations of man to the incomprehensible universe in which he finds himself existing, and has quickened the concern to learn how the deepest thinkers of other times have interpreted the mysteries of life, and especially what theory a poet such as Dante, holding a definite creed founded upon ancient tradition, had to offer in respect to the origin and destiny of man, and what solution he had to give to the doubts which even the most authoritative of creeds failed to satisfy, and to perplexities which it could not wholly clear away.<sup>103</sup>

Those “who are conscious of the needs of the soul of man,” Norton continues, “find a world which materialism creates & rejoices in, little better than a desert; their spiritual cravings are unsatisfied and they long to taste of what Dante calls the bread of angels. And it is the poets”—no longer, obviously, the Church—“who mainly supply them with this bread, the bread by which the imagination that shapes all the higher ideals of life is quickened and nurtured” (1:2). True to the conviction to which he had won through decades before, Norton insists again that Dante, supremely “the poet of man as a moral & responsible being” (1:3), had “transformed the dry bones of a theological system into a living body of truth” (1:8): the *Commedia* was thus to be revered “not merely as a work of highest literary art . . . but mainly as the endeavor of a great poet to explain the mystery of existence, and as the expression of the moral convictions of one of the most thoughtful and highminded men in regard to the conduct of life” (3:22). And right conduct, as always for Norton, dictated social responsibility, “so steady an aim at justice as the foundation of the social order on which the welfare of man depends” (6:11).

Like Norton’s other statements, the Turnbull lectures help document what Leslie J. Workman, pointing to the *stemma* of influence Gerald Graff has traced from Norton to Irving Babbitt, Paul Elmer More, and other literary scholars of the early decades of the twentieth century, has called “the transference of moral force in America from theology to literature”: Norton had absorbed wholeheartedly the principles of Matthew Arnold, another English luminary (they met in 1872) whom he considered among his friends, with regard to the social benefits of art.<sup>104</sup> In the final lecture, after an exposition of the *Paradiso*, Norton circles back to the *Convivio*, acknowledging his unworthiness to represent “the mighty shade” but

drawing “encouragement from the hope that those crumbs which falling from the table where the bread of angels is eaten, I have gathered at Dante’s feet, might by the sweetness of their savor inspire some longing for a full repast” (6:27–28). The maladies of the times, Norton recognized—the American “paradise of mediocrities,” to employ the title of one of his earlier publications<sup>105</sup>—crassly undermined the spirit of poetry:

The mass of men, indeed, are too dull, too busy, too trivial to listen. The noise of the world drowns its voice. What is the melody of the spheres to us deafened by the tumult of the street, the rattle of the engine, the screech of the steam-whistle? What is the divine smile of Beatrice to eyes dazzled with the electric light, or the soft flowing of her words to ears attuned to the shouts of the stock-exchange, or the gossip of the drawing-room?

But if we pause to consider, are not Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise still enacted to-day in this new world, undreamed of by Dante, in Washington, in Baltimore, in Boston, as when he visited them in Rome, in Pisa, and in Florence? And have we discovered any paths through them other than those along which he went? His theology we may reject: but his moral doctrine remains, and will remain, valid. (6:29)

Norton’s peroration betrays the antimodernism for which he was becoming legendary: the novelist William Dean Howells noticed that electric lighting never found its way to Shady Hill, and Norton once reportedly pointed out that a “solitary literary workman” required a “sequestered house without a telephone.”<sup>106</sup> The architect Ralph Adams Cram’s short-lived neo-medieval series *The Knight Errant* (1892) excerpted with approbation an 1888 address in which Norton decried “the spirit of self-satisfaction, begotten of our material prosperity,” that was steadily degrading American taste: “The bad work, with its appeal to the senses,—pretentious, showy, costly,—in which ingenuity has usurped the place of imagination, and expensive ugliness plays the part of beauty,—this work corrupts and vulgarizes the soul.”<sup>107</sup> Asked by Houghton and Mifflin in 1907 what he had thought of a publicity circular, Norton grouched that he was “not likely to get over my dislike of having my work treated as though it were in the class of patent medicines or Pears’ soap.”<sup>108</sup> But it is also evident that some of the institutions of the day enabled Norton’s wish to uplift the masses. The democratizing campaign for cultural literacy, yoked with the power of increasingly influential publishing houses, instigated prominent educational enterprises with which Norton was closely associated: Harvard’s Five-Foot Shelf, the

Heart of Oak series for children, and the Young Folks' Library, all of which carried in some form an imprimatur from Norton. Equally indicative of current trends were the encyclopedias and digests, streamlining literary history for the public library or the aspiring household. Norton's last significant handprint on the American reception of Dante was his contribution to the multivolume *Library of the World's Best Literature*, issued in 1896 by the writer and Harper's editor Charles Dudley Warner. Norton's lengthy introduction to passages from his translations of the *Vita Nuova* and the *Commedia* recycles material from the Turnbull lectures and earlier published essays, but it may be taken as a kind of summa, Norton's final public statement on the poet but also a retrospection on nearly forty years of study. We see him addressing one final time the critical problems of the *Vita Nuova*, *Commedia*, and *Convivio*, and conclusively proclaiming the moral utility of poetry: "For it is the imagination which lifts [man] from the petty, transient, and physical interests that engross the greater part of his time and thought in self-regarding pursuits, to the large, permanent, and spiritual interests that ennoble his nature, and transform him from a solitary individual into a member of the brotherhood of the human race."<sup>109</sup>

No poet has recorded his inner life more fully or with greater sincerity than Dante. All his more important writings have essentially the character of a spiritual autobiography, extending from boyhood to his later years. . . . Dante's life and his work are not to be regarded apart; they form a single whole, and they possess a dramatic development of unparalleled consistency and unity. The course of the events of his life shaped itself in accordance with an ideal for the imagination, and to this ideal his works correspond. . . . And herein lies the exceptional character of the poem, as at once a work of art of supreme beauty and a work of didactic morals of supreme significance. Art indeed cannot, if it would, divorce itself from morals. Into every work of art, whether the artist intend it or not, enters a moral element. But in art, beauty does not submit to be subordinated to any other end, and it is the marvel in Dante that while his main intent is didactic, he attains it by means of art so perfect that my only in a few rare passages does beauty fall a sacrifice to doctrine. (4333, 4343, 4346)

## VI

Norton devoted his final decade to settling the foundations he had laid for the study of Dante in his native land. In a last scholarly publication, in 1906, he reexamined the harmony between diction and tone—"an

orchestra of many instruments tuned in accord”—of the *Vita Nuova*, but this was little more than a codicil.<sup>110</sup> Now robed in authority, however, he was regularly called upon to attach his name to almost any new publication on Dante, however slender: his comments on the *Vita Nuova* for the Warner series were salvaged to preface a reissue of Rossetti's translation in 1907, and he ruefully admitted, in an introduction to George Putnam Huntington's *Comments of John Ruskin on the Divina Commedia* (1903), that “in spite of the lessons of life and the teachings of Dante himself,” Ruskin “did not learn to control the waywardness of his temperament, or to balance and correct the force of immediate impressions by recollection or comparison.”<sup>111</sup> Norton must have recalled how the erratic Ruskin, who died in 1900, had tried to deflect Norton's fatherly cautions by protesting in 1876 (January 20), after his obsession with Rose LaTouche had ended with her death, “I have been looking at your *Vita Nuova* again lately—I wonder whether, when he was alive, you would have told *him* that ‘anything that disturbed him was bad for him.’”<sup>112</sup> Along with Norton's various reviews, these scattered, ephemeral expressions join his lectures and handful of scholarly essays to trace the spoor of his interpretation: he never wrote a full-length book on his Italian master. Yet his influence on the study of Dante had become immeasurable, creditable largely to his gift for effective administration. The annual reports of the Dante Society, appearing at a steady pace, assiduously document the publication of new works of scholarship, the awarding of prizes, the increase in membership—in short, the nurturing of an organization that has endured for well over a century. Norton served as its president until his death, on October 21, 1908.

Norton's most material bequest lies in his assembly of a massive Dante library to be housed at Harvard; the process by which this occurred has recently been reconstructed in fascinating detail by Christian Y. Dupont.<sup>113</sup> As Turner recounts, “Some forty admirers clubbed together to raise fifteen thousand dollars to purchase the collection for the Harvard Library,” and, as a stray leaf among the Norton papers describes, a small ceremony took place in Norton's library in 1905 to celebrate the transfer. “It was a pleasant room,” wrote Constance Grosvenor Alexander, the witness: “A fire burned cheerily in the hearth, and his daughters served sherry and sponge-cake—all as usual.” Norton was presented with a parchment folder engraved with the names of donors and a sonorous inscription from *Inferno* 6.81—“Happy art thou, since all men later will

speak of thee,” as Alexander rendered the line.<sup>114</sup> Norton shed tears: the occasion was manifestly valedictory, even beatifying. But in becoming a monument, Norton was on the declivity to antiquation: the last still standing from a circle that had included Emerson, Longfellow, and Lowell, he had come to represent the past. For those who knew him in his last years, his benign figure dissolved into the tobacco-brown walls of his library in what Howells called “the gentle old house where his life began.”<sup>115</sup> In these evocations, Norton indeed seems suspended in a time warp: the unmarried sisters who attended him in his youth were succeeded by equally attentive unmarried daughters (whimsically nicknamed Inferno, Purgatorio, and Paradiso by Harvard students)<sup>116</sup> in a Victorian dutifulness that must already have seemed dated. With the turn of the century too Norton’s vatic style—reading Dante with Norton, Thayer recalled, “was almost an act of worship”<sup>117</sup>—was *démodé*. Van Wyck Brooks’s memoir of the readings at Shady Hill is unabashedly sardonic:

There, in the presence of “Dante Meeting Beatrice,” the picture that Rossetti had painted for Norton, half a dozen young men, interested, curious, or devout, listened with copies of the *Paradiso* open in their hands. They followed the text while Norton read aloud, like a learned, elegant, and venerable priest dispensing sacred mysteries to a circle of heretics, perhaps, who were unworthy of them. One felt there was something sacramental even in the sherry and the caraway cakes that a maidservant placed in our hands as we were about to depart.<sup>118</sup>

Shady Hill was demolished by Harvard, apparently without protest, in 1953.<sup>119</sup> Morality and altruism, the foundation of Norton’s critical premises, were similarly dying out as a basis for literary study. The writings of Norton’s successor at Harvard, Charles Grandgent (1862–1939), worthy as they are, reflect a telling shift in diction: Dante is still represented as admirably moral, but “character” is perceptibly giving way before the attractions of “personality” and “psychological interest.”<sup>120</sup>

Discreetly reticent in all that pertains to his bodily career, Dante opens wide the windows of his soul. Always, behind the majestic verses, we see the man, eager, intense, sensitive, vibrating to every touch, forceful, independent in thought and fearless in act, intelligent and imaginative far beyond his fellows, goaded by insatiable curiosity, learned but ever craving to learn more, reverent toward divine, but critical of worldly authority, adoring God with all his heart and abhorring God’s enemies, a whole-souled lover of the good and an unmitigated hater of the bad.<sup>121</sup>



This is not yet John Jay Chapman's picture of Dante in 1927 as "the archetype of the Introspective Writer" whose works are "a *journal intime*," but it seems to be on the way.<sup>122</sup> The recollection of Grandgent's classroom manner by the Romance scholar Wallace Fowlie indicates that Grandgent was hardly seeking to inspire: Fowlie says that taking the Dante course Grandgent would offer for the last time, he and his classmates "were, I must confess, disappointed that all he did in class—throughout the entire year—was to have us translate the Italian text as it appeared in his edition. From time to time he read aloud a passage in Italian and then asked one of us to translate it."<sup>123</sup>

With our probable dismay at what Fowlie rightly rejects as "such an absence of pedagogy and stimulation," we may find new respect for Norton's sublime assurance of vocation—and surely for his sense of cultural hospitality in an America already, as he was well aware, marked by economic and ethnic diversity and seeking in education what Henry James, describing the atmosphere of Shady Hill, remembered as "a sudden rise into finer and clearer air."<sup>124</sup> Nor can we easily dismiss Norton's moral criticism as flat and without nuance. Outfitted though it was in the verbal constructs of his time, Norton's dedication to Dante proves ultimately existential and moving, rooted authentically in his inner life: in biographical context, his writings form as much "a spiritual autobiography, extending from boyhood to his later years," as he himself perceived in the continuum of the *Vita Nuova*, the *Commedia*, and the *Convivio*. Few of us now can imagine Norton's life of dignified celibacy, his freedom from most of the irritations taken for granted in academe, even the quiet serenity of his domestic circumstances. But the hooded, piercing eyes that follow us from his portraits seem alert, inquiring, the gaze of a monitoring ancestor: what will you do with what I left you? On balance, we owe to Norton not simply the establishment of a literary field or a professional society, not simply the example of engaged and responsible scholarship and a genuine concern for students, but a compelling narrative of Dante's meaning for what John Freccero has memorably called the "novel of the self"—and the ghost of a hope that the bread distributed in our classrooms falls still, somehow, from the table of the angels.<sup>125</sup>

*Hope College*  
*Holland, Michigan*

## NOTES

1. Kermit Vanderbilt, *Charles Eliot Norton: Apostle of Culture in a Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1959), 138, quoted from *John Jay Chapman and His Letters*, ed. M.A. DeWolfe Howe (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1937). Vanderbilt anticipates Dowling and Turner in his balanced portrayal.
2. Linda Dowling, *Charles Eliot Norton: The Art of Reform in Nineteenth-Century America* (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2007), xii–xiii. A typical assessment of Norton by Brooks is this: “Always an invalid, he had carried his fastidiousness to a point that was all but absurd and unsound as well.” On the same page Brooks quotes George Santayana’s vignette, in *The Genteel Tradition at Bay* (New York: Scribner’s, 1931), of Norton’s “sweet sadness” as he told his classes, “shaking his head with a slight sigh, that the Greeks did not play football.” See Van Wyck Brooks, *New England: Indian Summer 1865–1915* (New York: Dutton, 1940), 420.
3. *The Letters of T.S. Eliot 1888–1965*, ed. Valerie Eliot, vol. 1 (San Diego, Calif.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), 176. Eliot was pleased, however, to find that Norton had been a friend of Sir Leslie Stephen, the father of Virginia Woolf (368), and he later wrote a brief review of the correspondence between Norton and Elizabeth Gaskell (*New England Quarterly* 6, no. 3 [1933]: 627–28).
4. James Turner, *The Liberal Education of Charles Eliot Norton* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 337; Turner is quoting here from Angelina LaPiana, *Dante’s American Pilgrimage: A Historical Survey of Dante Studies in the United States, 1800–1944* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949). LaPiana’s chapter on Norton (115–32) is still a very useful introduction.
5. [Charles Eliot Norton], “Dante, and His Latest English Translators,” *North American Review*, April 1866, 515.
6. Charles Eliot Norton, *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: A Sketch of His Life* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1907), 6.
7. Andrews Norton quoted in Turner, *The Liberal Education of Charles Eliot Norton*, 23. A letter (August, 4, 1803) from Samuel Norton, the father of Andrews, indicates that he tried to find his son an Italian dictionary (Houghton Library, bMs Am 1089, box 7). All references to unpublished documents in the Houghton Library, Harvard University, are either free of restriction or appear by permission.
8. *My Prisons: Memoirs of Silvio Pellico of Saluzzo*, ed. Andrews Norton (Cambridge, Mass.: Charles Folsom, 1836). See Angeline Helen Lograsso, “Due Lettere Inedite di Silvio Pellico (con una lettera inedita di Andrews Norton),” *Italica* 20, no. 3 (1943): 135–40.
9. For an informative discussion of the political implications of Dante study in early nineteenth-century New England, see K.P. Van Anglen, “Before Longfellow: Dante and the Polarization of New England,” *Dante Studies* 119 (2001): 155–86.
10. *Letters of T. W. Parsons*, ed. Zoltán Haraszti (Boston: Boston Public Library, 1940), reproduces passages from Parsons’s letters to Andrews Norton (28–31) that indicate the nature of the elder Norton’s commentary. Parsons’s correspondence with Charles Eliot Norton is also excerpted (62–67).
11. Charles Eliot Norton, preface to *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, trans. Thomas William Parsons (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1893), vi; see also [Charles Eliot Norton], “Dr. Parsons’s Translation of the *Inferno* of Dante,” *Nation* 5, October 1867: 269–71.
12. Quoted in Turner, *The Liberal Education of Charles Eliot Norton*, 178.
13. Quoted in Vanderbilt, *Charles Eliot Norton*, 29; see also Turner, *The Liberal Education of Charles Eliot Norton*, 53–54. Norton’s “Dissertation on Santa Croce” may be read at the Houghton Library (bMs Am 1088.5) but is badly faded.
14. Quoted in *The Letters of Charles Eliot Norton*, ed. Sara Norton and M.A. DeWolfe Howe (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1913), 1:21 (February 15, 1843).
15. [Charles Eliot Norton], “Dwellings and Schools for the Poor,” *North American Review* (April 1852), 464.

16. Charles Eliot Norton, *Considerations on Some Recent Social Theories* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1853), 20, 29, 26, 20, 158.
17. See Cynthia Zaitzevsky, "Housing Boston's Poor: The First Philanthropic Experiments," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 42, no. 2 (1983): 157–67.
18. On Norton's visits to the Holy Ghost Hospital for Incurables, see Samuel Eliot Morison, "Reminiscences of Charles Eliot Norton," *New England Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (1986): 365; Edward Waldo Emerson, "Charles Eliot Norton: The Man and the Scholar," *Charles Eliot Norton: Two Addresses* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1912), 23. In a touching detail, Emerson notes that in his last summer Norton furnished the hospital with electric fans.
19. [Charles Eliot Norton], "Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy: A Parsee Merchant," *North American Review*, July 1851, 144, 145.
20. Charles Eliot Norton, *Notes of Travel and Study in Italy* (1859; rpt., Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1887), 253ff., 262, 252, 267.
21. Quoted in Turner, *The Liberal Education of Charles Eliot Norton*, 139.
22. *Letters of Charles Eliot Norton*, 1:161. The "good books" included the French translation by the Abbé Lammenais, H.H. Milman's *History of Latin Christianity*, and the work of A.F. Ozanam; Norton used the text of the *Vita Nuova* edited by Pietro Fraticelli (1834) and disparaged the commentary by Picchioni (Turner, *The Liberal Education of Charles Eliot Norton*, 139, 152). On October 10, 1859, Norton informed Lowell that he had sent for "the Commentario of Francesco de Boti—and the Comment of Benvenuto da Imola which has lately been translated and published with the text" (Houghton Library, bMs Am 765).
23. *Letters of James Russell Lowell*, ed. Charles Eliot Norton (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1894), 1:276–77.
24. J. Chesley Mathews, ed., *Dante's Vita Nuova*, trans. Ralph Waldo Emerson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960). Norton's copy of the Garrow translation may be viewed online through Google Books.
25. Steve Ellis, *Dante and English Poetry: Shelley to T. S. Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 103–7; see also Alison Milbank, *Dante and the Victorians* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 104–5. For the nineteenth-century reception of Dante in the visual arts, including the paintings of Rossetti, see *Dante Rediscovered: From Blake to Rodin*, ed. David Bindman, Stephen Hebron, and Michael O'Neill (Grasmere: Wordsworth Trust, 2007).
26. *Letters of Charles Eliot Norton*, 1:174.
27. *The Correspondence of John Ruskin and Charles Eliot Norton*, ed. John Lewis Bradley and Ian Ousby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 56; see also *Letters of Charles Eliot Norton*, 1:206.
28. Quoted in Turner, *The Liberal Education of Charles Eliot Norton*, 156.
29. [Charles Eliot Norton], "'The New Life' of Dante," *Atlantic Monthly*, January (62–69), February (202–12), March (330–39) 1859; further citations in the text.
30. On Norton's relationship with Ruskin, see Theodore E. Stebbins Jr., with Susan C. Ricci, "Charles Eliot Norton: Ruskin's Friend, Harvard's Sage," in *The Last Ruskinians: Charles Eliot Norton, Charles Herbert Moore, and Their Circle*, ed. Theodore E. Stebbins Jr. and Virginia Anderson (Cambridge: Harvard University Art Museums, 2007), 13–30.
31. Henry Francis Cary, "Life of Dante," *The Vision: or Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, of Dante Alighieri* (New York: Appleton, 1850), 26; Ugo Foscolo, rev. of the Cary translation, *Edinburgh Review*, February 1818, collected in *Dante: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Michael Caesar (London: Routledge, 1989), 457.
32. In his review of John Addington Symonds's *An Introduction to the Study of Dante* (*Nation*, October 2, 1890), Norton chides Symonds for making "hardly a reference" to the *Convivio* (272).
33. All quotations from Norton's unfinished translation of the *Convivio* are taken from Charles Eliot Norton, "Dante," *Library of the World's Best Literature*, ed. Charles Dudley Warner (New York: J.A. Hill, 1896), 11:4315–78. A file of handwritten drafts is preserved at the Houghton Library (bMs Am 1088.5).

34. Charles Eliot Norton, "The *Convito* and the *Vita Nuova*," *The New Life of Dante Alighieri*, trans. Charles Eliot Norton (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1892), 107.
35. Charles S. Singleton modified Norton's theory of the *Vita Nuova*'s structure in *An Essay on the "Vita Nuova"* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949). See also Michelangelo Picone, "*Vita Nuova*," *The Dante Encyclopedia*, ed. Richard Lansing (New York: Garland, 2000), 874–78.
36. Charles Eliot Norton, *The New Life of Dante: An Essay with Translations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Riverside Press, 1859), n.p.
37. *Letters of T. W. Parsons*, 53. Parsons wanted the poem published in the *Atlantic*, but Norton modestly blocked it.
38. *The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell and Charles Eliot Norton 1855–1865*, ed. Jane Whitehill (London: Oxford University Press/Humphrey Milford, 1932), 52 (see also 76).
39. *Correspondence of John Ruskin and Charles Eliot Norton*, 56.
40. Journals of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Houghton Library, bMs Am 1340.
41. See, for example, Hermann Welcker and J.B.D., "On the Skull of Dante," *Anthropological Review* 5, no. 16 (1867): 56–71. Norton addressed the attribution to Giotto (which he continued to credit) in "Dante's Portrait in the Bargello," *Century*, April 27, 1884, 956.
42. Charles Eliot Norton to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Houghton Library, bMs Am 1340.2 (4150).
43. "Remarks of Mr. Norton at the Annual Meeting of the Dante Society, May 16, 1882," rpt. in *Dante Studies* 118 (2000): 5.
44. *Letters of Charles Eliot Norton*, 1:293 (see also 294).
45. Charles Eliot Norton, *On the Original Portraits of Dante* (Cambridge, Mass.: University Press, 1865), 15–16. Norton is misquoting James Russell Lowell's "To W.L. Garrison": the line should be "fortressed in conscience and impregnable will." Interestingly enough, the passage from Norton was borrowed (without attribution but with the misquotation intact) by Carl Hovey to describe the subject of his biography *Stonewall Jackson* (Boston: Small, Mann, 1900). The volume was part of the series *Beacon Biographies*, edited by Norton's friend (and later the coeditor of his letters), M.A. DeWolfe Howe.
46. Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, in Caesar, *Dante: The Critical Heritage*, 532.
47. *Letters of Charles Eliot Norton*, 2:31.
48. Houghton Library, bMs Am 1088.2 (Whitehill's collection mistakenly assumes that the recipient was Elizabeth Gaskell, who had died in 1865). The Gaskells were Unitarians.
49. Charles Eliot Norton, "On the New Life," *The New Life of Dante Alighieri* (1867), 105.
50. I cite, for example, Norton's letter of February 4, 1866, to E.L. Godkin, cofounder of the periodical, with regard to Emerson's essay "Character": "It is the most unflinching assertion of the supreme right to private judgment, of the wrong done to human nature by 'authority' in matters of religion; of the temporariness of all forms of religion, the everlasting freshness of the religious spirit. It is, if rightly understood, a profoundly religious paper: wrongly read it is freethinking almost to blasphemy which will cause the hair to stand on end of every clergyman in the land & will bring down the religious press with the most animated rage" (Houghton Library, bMs Am 1083).
51. Charles Eliot Norton, "Religious Liberty," *North American Review*, April 1867, 586, 594, 595.
52. [Charles Eliot Norton], "The Church and Religion," *North American Review*, April 1868, 381.
53. "Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy," 136.
54. *Correspondence of John Ruskin and Charles Eliot Norton*, 186.
55. "Dante, and His Latest English Translators," 510, 513.
56. Dowling, *Charles Eliot Norton*, 114. The passage in Dowling directed me to Acland's diary excerpt (Houghton Library, bMs Am 1088.5), which was apparently copied and sent to Norton, or possibly to his family, at a much later date.
57. *Correspondence of John Ruskin and Charles Eliot Norton*, 272.
58. *Ibid.*, 147.

59. *Ibid.*, 175–76.
60. *Letters of Mrs. Gaskell and Charles Eliot Norton*, 97.
61. *Ibid.*, 98.
62. Quoted in Dowling, *Charles Eliot Norton*, 110.
63. Quoted in Turner, *The Liberal Education of Charles Eliot Norton*, 366.
64. Quoted in Turner, *The Liberal Education of Charles Eliot Norton*, 305.
65. *Correspondence of John Ruskin and Charles Eliot Norton*, 314–15.
66. *Ibid.*, 331.
67. *Letters of Charles Eliot Norton*, 2:18.
68. Quoted in Vanderbilt, *Charles Eliot Norton*, 112; *Letters of Charles Eliot Norton*, 1:415.
69. “The ‘New Life’ of Dante Alighieri,” *Atlantic Monthly*, 2:202.
70. Dowling, *Charles Eliot Norton*, 118.
71. *Letters of Charles Eliot Norton*, 2:283. The student was C.C. Stillman, who would endow the Charles Eliot Norton chair in poetry at Harvard in 1925.
72. Diary for 1872 [–1873], Houghton Library, bMs Am 1088.5 (box 13). Witte, so aggressively educated by his father that he received his PhD at the age of fourteen, encountered the work of Dante during a visit to Florence shortly thereafter; his essay “On Misunderstanding Dante” appeared in 1824, precipitating a respected series of Dante *Forschungen*. For an account of Witte’s early training, see the account by his father, Karl Heinrich Gottfried Witte, *The Education of Karl Witte, or, The Training of the Child*, ed. H. Addington Bruce, trans. Leo Weiner (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1914). Witte’s edition of the *Vita Nuova*, published in Leipzig in 1876, bore a dedication to “Carlo Eliot Norton,” “profondo conoscitore di Dante ed ingegnossissimo interprete della *Vita Nuova*.”
73. Dowling, *Charles Eliot Norton*, 132.
74. Barrett Wendell, “Mr. Lowell as a Teacher,” *Scribner’s*, November 10, 1891, 648.
75. “The *Convito* and the *Vita Nuova*,” 127.
76. Norton’s assumption that the *Vita Nuova*, *Convivio*, and *Commedia* form a sustained and unified narrative conspicuously parallels Witte’s position. Witte, who lost his first wife six weeks after their wedding, wrote in an 1831 essay titled simply “Dante” that “Speculation,” or philosophical enquiry, was allegorized by Dante “as a gracious maiden in whose glance he seems to find a reflection of Beatrice’s love and a look of heavenly pity. Many a disconsolate soul has found that zealous effort for others, or for the common good, has been capable of bringing long seasons of calm, and he who has once acclimatised himself to this atmosphere may well end by finding his home and his mission there.” His later essay “Dante’s Trilogy” (1869) refines his earlier studies and rejects the view that “there is any real contradiction between the testimony of the *Vita Nuova* and the inferences deducible from the *Convivio*. . . .” In a lengthy note, Witte approves the position of the Italian critic Dionisi that, in Witte’s summary, “Dante’s love of the transfigured Beatrice of the *Divine Comedy* is but a wondrous fusion of the two [his youthful love for Beatrice and his attraction to the *donna gentile*], a symbolisation of the loftiest philosophy under the name of his dead love.” See Karl Witte, *Essays on Dante*, trans. C. Mabel Lawrence, ed. Philip H. Wicksteed (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1898), 12, 58.
77. *The New Life of Dante Alighieri*, trans. Charles Eliot Norton (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1892), 93 (the 1902 reissue is identical); Norton’s letter to Houghton, Mifflin, Houghton Library, bMs Am 1925 (1322).
78. *Letters of Charles Eliot Norton*, 2:393.
79. “Correspondence between Charles Eliot Norton and the Honorable William Warren Vernon,” *Annual Report of the Dante Society* 47–48 (1930): 45.
80. See *Letters of Charles Eliot Norton*, 1:385, 2:30. Norton first taught Dante in 1877, during Lowell’s absence, then became solely responsible for Dante classes at Harvard in 1886. He continued to offer instruction after his retirement in 1898.
81. Rollo Walter Brown, *Harvard Yard in the Golden Age* (New York: Current Books, 1948), 153; Daniel Gregory Mason, “At Harvard in the Nineties,” *New England Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (1936): 43.
82. *Letters of Charles Eliot Norton*, 2:87.
83. *Correspondence of John Ruskin and Charles Eliot Norton*, 458.

84. William Roscoe Thayer, "Professor Charles Eliot Norton," *Annual Report of the Dante Society* 28 (1909): 2–3.
85. *Letters of Charles Eliot Norton*, 2:116–17.
86. *Correspondence of John Ruskin and Charles Eliot Norton*, 303.
87. James Geddes, "A Famous Dante Course," *Bulletin of the American Association of Teachers of Italian* 2.2 (May 1925), 24; Mason, "At Harvard in the Nineties," 65.
88. Eliot quoted in Leslie J. Workman, "'My First Real Tutor': John Ruskin and Charles Eliot Norton," rev. of *The Correspondence of John Ruskin and Charles Eliot Norton*, *New England Quarterly* 62, no. 4 (1989): 577. On Dante and contemporary religious doubt, see James Turner, *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 252–53, and T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), 155.
89. Charles Eliot Norton, *Historical Studies of Church-Building in the Middle Ages: Venice, Siena, Florence* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1880).
90. Charles Eliot Norton, introduction to *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, trans. Norton, rev. ed. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1902), vol. 1, *Hell*, xii, xvi; further citations in the text. The only recorded instance of Norton's disagreement with Dante, preserved in the class notes of William Roscoe Thayer, is his vindication of the heretic Farinata (see James Fasanelli, "Charles Eliot Norton and His Guides: A Study of Sources," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 26, no. 2 [1967]: 255–56).
91. [Charles Eliot Norton], "Longfellow's Translation of the *Divine Comedy*," *North American Review*, July 1867, 133.
92. [Charles Eliot Norton], "On the Reading of Dante," *Century*, February 27, 1884, 629.
93. See Turner, *The Liberal Education of Charles Eliot Norton*, 156–57.
94. "Dante, and His Latest English Translators," 527.
95. "Mr. Longfellow's Translation of the Divine Comedy," *Nation*, May 4, 1867, 369. Working on his own translation, however, Norton decided that regardless of the "abundant resources of the Italian tongue in rhyme, and with all Dante's mastery of them, the truth still is that his triple rhyme often compelled him to exact from words such service as they did not naturally render. . . ." (preface to *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, 1:xiii). Along the same lines, Norton wrote to Samuel Gray Ward (September 19, 1900), "I dare say that you have noticed that the chief verbal difficulties in the poem are in the rhyme-words. Dante's boast that no word had ever compelled him to say aught but what he wished, but that he had often compelled words to say other than they were used to say, is quite legitimate if it be rightly understood. Many of his strained metaphors, of which there is abundance, are due to the exactions of rhyme" (*Letters of Charles Eliot Norton*, 2:299–300).
96. "Dante, and His Latest English Translators," 517; 521; "Rossetti's Translations from the Early Italian Poets," *Nation*, May 5, 1874, 160; "Dean Plumptre's Translations of the Divine Comedy," *Nation*, February 5, 1887, 102; review of the Temple Classics edition of *Paradiso*, *Nation*, May 17, 1900, 91. On Plumptre, see Ralph Pite, "'The Perilous Depths of Doubt': Dante, Plumptre and Victorian Faith," in *Dante's Modern Afterlife: Reception and Responses from Blake to Heaney*, ed. Nick Havely (Basingstoke: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's, 1998), 481–94. For a complete list of Norton's reviews of Dante translations, see Turner, *The Liberal Education of Charles Eliot Norton*, 481–94.
97. Turner, *The Liberal Education of Charles Eliot Norton*, 334. For more on the publication of Norton's version, see my "Dante in America: The First Hundred Years," in *Reading Books: Essays on the Material Text and Literature in America*, ed. Michele Moylan and Lane Stiles (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), esp. 35–39.
98. See Joan Shelley Rubin, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), esp. chapter 1, "Self, Culture, and Self-Culture in America" (1–28); Neil Harris, "The Gilded Age Revisited: Boston and the Museum Movement," *American Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (1962): 543–68.
99. *The Letters of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, ed. Andrew Hilen, vol. 6 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 346.
100. Mason, "At Harvard in the Nineties," 64.

101. *Letters of Charles Eliot Norton*, 2:218.
102. "Correspondence between Charles Eliot Norton and the Honorable William Warren Vernon," 31.
103. "Dante Lectures," Houghton Library, bMs Am 1088.5, box 13, 1:1; further citations in the text.
104. Workman, "'My First Real Tutor,'" 577; see Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 82–83. The late Leslie Workman, who was my husband, had hoped to write his own book on Norton; in the preparation of this essay I have drawn on many of the source materials he collected.
105. Charles Eliot Norton, "The Paradise of Mediocrities," *Nation*, July 5, 1865: 43–44.
106. William Dean Howells, "Charles Eliot Norton: A Reminiscence," *North American Review*, December 1913, 840; Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "Charles Eliot Norton," *The Outlook*, October 31, 1908, 493.
107. Charles Eliot Norton, "Portion of an Address Given in MDCCCLXXXVIII," *The Knight Errant* (Boston, 1892), 5.
108. Charles Eliot Norton to Houghton, Mifflin (March 14, 1907), Houghton Library, bMs Am 1925 (1322).
109. Charles Eliot Norton, "Dante," 4315: further citations in the text. Norton's bibliographical note to this essay (4347–48) may also be of interest. A later but much shorter comment by Norton is "The Purpose of the *Divine Comedy*," *Roma Letteraria*, April 10, 1899, 149–51.
110. Charles Eliot Norton, "Note on the Vocabulary of the *Vita Nuova*," *Annual Report of the Dante Society* 25 (1906): 4.
111. Charles Eliot Norton, preface to *The New Life by Dante Alighieri*, trans. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Literature of Italy 1265–1907* (New York: National Alumni, 1907); George Putnam Huntington, ed., *Comments of John Ruskin on the Divina Commedia* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1903), xi.
112. *Correspondence of John Ruskin and Charles Eliot Norton*, 376.
113. See Christian Y. Dupont, "Collecting and Reading Dante in America: Harvard College Library and the Dante Society," *Harvard Library Bulletin* 20, no. 3 (2010), forthcoming; also "Collecting Dante from Tuscany: The Formation of the Fiske Dante Collection at Cornell University," *Studies in Bibliography* 58 (2007–2008): 185–210.
114. Turner, *The Liberal Education of Charles Eliot Norton*, 407–408; Constance Grosvenor Alexander, "An Evening in the Library of Charles Eliot Norton, 11 May 1905," Houghton Library, MS Am 1088.7. Petrocchi's text reads "Felice te se si parli a tua posta," but the edition Alexander used read "Felice te, che si parli a tua posta."
115. Howells, "Charles Eliot Norton: A Reminiscence," 837.
116. Helen Howe, *The Gentle Americans: Biography of a Breed* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 199.
117. Thayer, "Professor Charles Eliot Norton," 5.
118. Van Wyck Brooks, *An Autobiography* (New York: Dutton, 1965), 120. Brooks was at Harvard from 1904 to 1907.
119. Timothy P. Duffy, "The Gender of Letters: Charles Eliot Norton and the Decline of the Amateur Intellectual Tradition," *New England Quarterly* 69, no. 1 (1996): Paul J. Sachs, director of the Fogg Museum at Harvard from 1915 to 1944, also resided at Shady Hill (Stebbins, "Charles Eliot Norton: Ruskin's Friend, Harvard's Sage," 25).
120. Charles Hall Grandgent, *The Power of Dante* (Boston: Marshall Jones, 1918), 67.
121. Charles Hall Grandgent, *Discourses on Dante* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1924), 10–11.
122. John Jay Chapman, *Dante* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1927), 74.
123. Wallace Fowlie, introduction to *A Reading of Dante's Inferno* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 3.
124. Henry James, "An American Art-Scholar: Charles Eliot Norton," *Burlington Magazine*, January 1909, 201.
125. John Freccero, "Dante's Novel of the Self," *Christian Century* 6 Oct. 1965: 1216–18.

# Contemplating Wonder: “Ad-miratio” in Richard of St. Victor and Dante

VALENTINA ATTURO

Un punto solo m'è maggior letargo  
che venticinque secoli a la 'mpresa  
che fé Nettuno *ammirar* l'ombra d'Argo.

Così la mente mia, tutta sospesa,  
*mirava* fissa, immobile e attenta,  
e sempre di *mirar* faceasi accesa.

(*Par.* 33.94–99)<sup>1</sup>

The metaphor of the Argo's shadow, one of the most remarkable images in the *Commedia*, has been analyzed in great detail in terms of its thematic framing of the final canto<sup>2</sup> and of its narrative, stylistic, and philosophical-theological significance. Here Dante arduously strives to convey an understanding of the ineffable,<sup>3</sup> and the reader is challenged to interpret the significance of these verses. The obscurity in these lines affects the overall interpretation of the canto and especially where we see the transition from the description of his otherworldly experience toward an attempt to narrate it *per similitudines*.<sup>4</sup>

The critical explanation of this passage relies heavily on the analysis of individual words that resonate and intensify within the poetic texture, establishing some figurative links with other parts of the macro-text: although some of the key terms (*punto*,<sup>5</sup> *letargo*,<sup>6</sup> *ombra*<sup>7</sup>) have been thoroughly researched for their precise semantic significance, the same in-depth analysis does not seem to have been done for other key words, namely “*ammirar-mirava-mirar*” and the concept of *ad-miratio*, which has a remarkably philosophical relevance<sup>8</sup> and permeates the lexical fabric of



the *terzine* in question. Through an analytical investigation of the lattice-work of terms associated with *ad-miratio*, it is possible to determine the origin of the similes that in *Paradiso* 33.94–99 represent the climax of Dante’s vision of God. As a result, our understanding of the final verses of *Paradiso* 33, which mark the culmination of Dante’s experience of wonder, acquires greater depth and resonance, leading us to further insights about the structure and linguistic properties of the canto.

### Gazing into the divine light

Gazing into the divine light, Dante has united, with tactile<sup>9</sup> perception, his power of sight with the divine (“*i’ giunsi / l’aspetto mio col valore infinito*” [*Par.* 33.80–81]). His eyes penetrate so far into the sublime light that he loses the perception of the world around him. In short, he is blinded by the light (“*Oh abbondante grazia ond’io presunsi / ficcar lo viso per la luce eterna, / tanto che la veduta vi consunsi!*” [82–84]). Dante describes his mind as being “all rapt . . . gazing, fixed, motionless and intent, ever enkindled by its gazing” (97–99).<sup>10</sup> Neptune “marvels” (“*ammirar*”) at Argo’s shadow, and Dante’s repetition of the verb *mirare* is particularly significant in the light of the Victorine concept of *ad-miratio*. In all likelihood Dante’s idea of contemplation was heavily influenced<sup>11</sup> by the works of Richard of St. Victor,<sup>12</sup> one of the most important Victorine mystics and a notable preacher and theologian. I argue that the semantic value and the technical use of Richard’s concept of *ad-miratio* are central to the model of contemplation in Dante’s *Commedia*.

The repetition (*reduplicatio*) of “*mirava-mirar*” knits together linguistically with the “*ammirar*” of Neptune, whose intense bewilderment in the presence of the Argonauts is projected onto Dante-pilgrim at the end of his journey. In fact, *ad-miratio* has already been mentioned at the beginning of *Paradiso* (“*Que’ gloriosi che passaro al Colco / non s’ammiraron come voi farete, / quando Iasón vider fatto bifolco*” [*Par.* 2.16–18]), with Ovidian references (“*mirantur Colchi*” [*Met.* 7.120]). *Ad-miratio* is the trigger point of Dante’s *quête* in *Paradiso* and it deeply pervades the divine journey of the pilgrim. It marks the rising toward God and is explicitly evoked at the beginning and the end of the *cantilena circolata*,<sup>13</sup> as shown in *Par.* 1.97–99:

e dissi: "Già contento *requièvi*  
di grande *ammirazion*; ma ora *ammiro*  
com'io trascenda questi corpi levi."

The strong and persistent repetition of "ammirazion-ammiro" is taken up again by Beatrice and serves as an ideal leitmotif underlined in the final verse of the same canto:

Non dei più *ammirar*, se bene stimo,  
lo tuo salir, se non come d'un rivo  
se d'alto monte scende giusto ad imo.  
(*Par.* 1.136–38)

Having traveled through all of the spheres and having passed the threshold of Paradise, Dante arrives at the opposite end of a figurative memorial arch.<sup>14</sup> The final moment of contemplation ("Così la *mente* mia, tutta *sospesa*, / *mirava fissa, immobile e attenta*" [*Par.* 33.97–98]) is characterized by the intensity of an absorbed vision (the insistency of *mirare*) that plunges into the static mind, described as "intelletto"<sup>15</sup> in *Paradiso* 1.8, and reaches to unseen things. The suspended mind is defined by its fixed nature ("fissa") and its complete immobility ("immobile"). To evoke this state of rapture in which the mind is totally absorbed, Dante emphasizes four adjectives that project the idea of purposeful immobility: "immobile intensità che si vuole appunto figurare: *sospesa* vale "in sospensione," "in attesa" . . . ; *fissa, immobile e attenta* esprimono l'intensa concentrazione dello sguardo, e la totale immobilità in cui la mente è *sospesa*."<sup>16</sup>

*Fixity* and *attention* are used together throughout the *Commedia* to describe the gradual development of a non-virtuous "attraction" beginning with the seductive sounds of Casella in *Purgatorio*<sup>17</sup> toward a final destination, where sight is sharpened and reaches a state of immobility, as already seen in the Empyrean rose:

Bernardo, come vide li *occhi miei*  
nel caldo suo caler *fissi e attenti*,  
li suoi con tanto affetto volse a lei,  
che' miei di *rimirar* fê più ardenti.  
(*Par.* 31.139–42)

The mind's eye (*oculus mentis*), straining to see "la forma universal" of divine love, is absorbed in a moment of contemplation which hinges

paradoxically on an instant of fleeting eternity (“*sempre di mirar faceasi accesa*” [Par. 33.99]). This immobile sight continuously regenerates in the longing for divine ascension. A “supremo istante di meraviglia”<sup>18</sup> is how Piero Boitani describes this *punctum*. In particular, the penetration of the gaze into the *lumen Dei*, depicted figuratively by the thread “*ammirar-mirava-mirar*,” was initiated in the first part of Canto 33, by the succession of ascending stages toward development of the visual capacity of the pilgrim, whose gaze becomes sharper and sharper (“*ché la mia vista, venendo sincera, / e più e più intrava per lo raggio*” [Par. 33.52–53]): he is unable to look away from the object (“*Io credo, per l’acume ch’io sofferesi / del vivo raggio, ch’i’ sarei smarrito / se li occhi miei da lui fossero aversi*” [Par. 33.76–78]). After an attempt to withstand the splendor of the light (“*fui più ardito / per questo a sostener, tanto ch’i’ giunsi / l’aspetto mio col valore infinito*” [Par. 33.79–81]; “*ficcar lo viso per la luce eterna*” [83]) and with the exhaustion of visual potential, the pilgrim experiences a “*vista nova*” (136).

In the Argo’s shadow metaphor, the use of the verb *ammirare* describes not only a generic kind of wonder, essentially a “paradigmatic emotion,”<sup>19</sup> but reveals an indebtedness to a well-established theological and philosophical tradition. Indeed, the mystical theologian Richard of St. Victor bases his whole theory of contemplation on the concept of *ad-miratio*.

### ***Ad-miratio***

The etymology<sup>20</sup> of the verb “*ammirare*,” from the Latin *ĀD-MĪROR*,<sup>21</sup> is complex. The Latin verb comprises the preposition *ĀD*,<sup>22</sup> meaning upward, and the verb *MĪROR*, meaning to stare with amazement, in an enchanted gaze. The Latin noun *ad-miratio*, which is the root of the Italian “*ammirazione*,” indicates a specific kind of gaze that is “fixed and directed *toward*” an object of longing. Etymological reconstruction and systematic analysis of patristic thought reveals that the term undergoes a semantic transformation from “gazing *toward*” an object to “gazing *upward*.”

By tracing linguistic Indo-European roots,<sup>23</sup> we can attest to the fact that a conceptual and semantic bond links the emotion of “admiration” to the experience of “seeing,” so that it can be considered on a much

more profound level—that of viewing the world in what we could call an “absolute metaphor.”<sup>24</sup> Less obvious, perhaps, is the origin of the upward inclination of sight, which figuratively implies height. The idea of a soaring gaze is connected to the image of transcendence, which, from a *visual anthropological*<sup>25</sup> point of view, is related to the idea of free flight. As Gilbert Durand observes, on the subject of ascending symbols:

Risulta . . . naturale che gli schemi assiomatici della *verticalizzazione* sensibilizzino e avvalorino positivamente tutte le rappresentazioni della verticalità, dall'*ascensione* all'*elevazione*. Ciò spiega la notevole frequenza mitologica e rituale delle pratiche ascensionali. . . . Tutti questi simboli rituali sono *mezzi per raggiungere il cielo*.<sup>26</sup>

Consequently, *ad-miratio* denotes a selective and determined vision and, importantly, vision that is directed upward. This upward vision transmits the metaphorical idea of elevated thought lifting the subject to higher and broader mental horizons. Actually, the English word “admire” is rarely associated with sight and is much more frequently used in the sense of looking up to someone or thinking highly of someone. From Dante’s perspective, the gaze of admiration which tends upward is epitomized effectively in the description of the hierarchically structured angelic orders that are drawn toward God in the *Cristallino*:

Questi ordini di sù tutti s'ammirano,  
e di giù vincon sì, che verso Dio  
tutti tirati sono e tutti tirano.

(Par. 28.127–29)

In the *Coelum Angelorum*, which immediately precedes the sphere in which God presides, the steps of angels are positioned so that each looks upward toward the step above, each higher level expressing a higher degree of angelic virtue. The lower orders exert their influence, resulting in a thrust upward, in a “violenta spinta verso l’alto—insieme subita e esercitata—che stringe in unità tutto l’universo,”<sup>27</sup> toward God at the apex of the ladder and the source that unites all the expressions of *ad-miratio*.

### Mapping Admiration: A Rhythmical Escalation

In Dante’s *Commedia*, instances of admiration strategically punctuate the journey in a rhythmical ascending fashion increasing in frequency toward

the end of *Paradiso*. There are no fewer than twenty-four occurrences of the root *ammir-* in *Purgatorio* and in *Paradiso*. These words<sup>28</sup> reveal a variety of functions: the reaction of surprise arising from an inexplicable event;<sup>29</sup> the admiring attitude of the souls in *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* on discovering Dante's corporeality,<sup>30</sup> and, vice versa, the stunned reaction of the pilgrim in the presence of certain groups of souls; the emotional state of Dante in accepting scientific explanations about incomprehensible natural phenomena that raise doubts and misgivings;<sup>31</sup> the intelligible nature of the pilgrim's otherworldly journey in the third *cantica* and the reaction it provokes during its unfolding;<sup>32</sup> and contemplative moments of high tension.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, the "meraviglia all'interno di un testo rigorosamente geometrico cosparge di rughe e di fremiti l'orizzonte della scrittura"; . . . "lo stupore e la sorpresa sono i sentimenti dominanti nell'opera . . . di Dante."<sup>34</sup>

It is notable that *ad-miratio*, like *stupore*, is an emotion which Dante-author reserves for the ascending phases of the journey (both terms are recorded only in *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*). These higher emotions are the spiritual evolution and transformation of the attitude of curiosity (*curiositas*) which he experiences in *Inferno*, which, in Augustinian terms (*concupiscentia oculorum*), is a sensation compromised by physiological human impulses.<sup>35</sup> In fact, for Dante, the act of admiration is the cause and also the result of the vision of God. The initial process of intelligent vision which allows Dante to create images becomes weaker and eventually collapses at the point where he perceives God through experience rather than vision. In the final moment of revelation the magnitude of admiration achieved by his penetrating gaze is such that Dante is fully absorbed in divine contemplation.

Significantly, in *Inferno* there is no trace of *ad-miratio*. Despite the fact that the first canticle is animated by a recurring sense of surprise,<sup>36</sup> it is often combined with the horror that accompanies the representation of the *monstrum* ("ch'i' vidi per quell'aere grosso e scuro / venir notando una figura in suso, / meravigliosa ad ogni cor sicuro" [*Inf.* 16.130–32], and "Oh quanto parve a me gran meraviglia / quand'io vidi tre facce a la sua testa!" [*Inf.* 34.37–38]). The expressions of surprise are recorded by words of wonder, such as *maraviglia*, a term Dante-author uses to signal emotional or cognitive excitement (often emphasized by physiological manifestations), triggered by various events (recognition of souls,<sup>37</sup> monstrous phenomena,<sup>38</sup> miraculous and unusual events,<sup>39</sup> invectives,<sup>40</sup> moments of

intellectual effort during which the reaction of surprise activates a broader cognitive process,<sup>41</sup> etc.).

The terms deriving from the roots *stup-* and *ammir-*, however, are used solely as markers highlighting crucial moments allowing progression in *Deum*. In the spiritual path toward God the *ad-miratio* entwines with *stupore* to mark the stages of the ascetic journey.<sup>42</sup> In Dante's mind, suspended between desire and fulfillment of perfect admiration, there is an amplified echo of the stunned soul ("stordimento d'animo") described in *Convivio* and manifest in the canto of the divine vision at the threshold of the sublime:

Ché lo *stupore* è uno *stordimento d'animo*, per *grandi e maravigliose cose* vedere o udire o per alcuno modo sentire: che in quanto paiono grandi, fanno reverente a sé quelli che le sente; in quanto paiono *mirabili*, fanno *voglioso di sapere quelle*.<sup>43</sup>

### Waiting for dawn: Beatrice-bird metaphor

In *Paradiso* the gradual stages of admiration increase in intensity toward the final moment of wonder in the Empyrean (Canto 33), which mirrors Beatrice's earlier moment of wonder (Canto 23) as she awaits sunrise with the same fixed gaze and suspended mind, contemplating the boundary between the human and the Divine:

Come l'augello, intra l'amate fronde,  
posato al nido de' suoi dolci nati  
la notte che le cose ci nasconde,

che, per veder li aspetti disiiati  
e per trovar lo cibo onde li pasca,  
in che gravi labor li sono aggrati,  
previene il tempo in su aperta frasca,  
e con ardente affetto il sole aspetta,  
**fiso guardando** pur che l'alba nasca;  
così la donna mia stava eretta  
e **attenta**, rivolta inver' la plaga  
sotto la quale il sol mostra men fretta:

sì che, veggendola io **sospesa** e vaga,  
fecimi qual è quei che disiando  
altro vorria, e sperando s'appaga.

(Par. 23.1–15)

Così la mente mia, tutta **sospesa**,  
**mirava fissa**, immobile e **attenta**,  
e sempre di **mirar** faceasi accesa.

(Par. 33.97–99)

As we can note from linguistic and figurative similarities, the entwined thread between the themes of *ad-miratio*, *suspensio mentis* and *contemplatio*

form the thematic and lexical focus that emerges both in Beatrice-bird metaphor and in Argo's shadow metaphor. This intertextual thread highlights a particular psychological condition of Dante-pilgrim which we can define as a kind of fixed yet suspended gaze which was theorized by many notable Victorines.<sup>44</sup>

It is worth noting that three of the four adjectives used by Dante in Argo's shadow metaphor to characterize the quality of the mind's eye in admiration are the same ones chosen to describe Beatrice's intense gaze: "suspended," "fixed," and "attentive." However, this is not the only similarity between the two extracts because within the lexical framework there are many occurrences of similar words and images, and, in particular, there is an obvious link between the metaphorical image of the bird awaiting sunrise and the final vision of Dante awaiting the light of Christ in Canto 33 of *Paradiso*.

In the Sky of the Fixed Stars, Dante is only allowed to see God through the reflection<sup>45</sup> in Beatrice's eyes. Here not only is Beatrice represented as a bird, but Dante-pilgrim is also represented as a new-born chick. This is a significant analogy because while a fully grown bird is capable of looking at the sun, a new-born is not. Consequently, Beatrice the bird must transmit this powerful sight to Dante in order for him to complete his spiritual development.

The way in which Beatrice is able to stare provokes a similar longing in Dante-pilgrim: she is attentive and, with suspended mind, she only sees the dawn and waits patiently for God. Since it is only at the very end of the journey that Dante's sight is sufficiently strong to enable him to stare directly at the eternal light, the Beatrice-bird metaphor is an important precursor that anticipates Dante's final vision of God.

The lexis employed to describe the metaphor of Beatrice/bird is especially significant in light of sun symbolism in the Middle Ages: "The sun plays a crucial role in the symbolism of the *Commedia* . . . as well as imaging the goal and means of the pilgrim's *iter mentis* . . . [it] has structural significance."<sup>46</sup> In medieval Christian thought the sun represents God and the dawn the coming of Christ, as Dante notes in the *Convivio*: "Ora è da ragionare, per lo sole spiritual Intelligibile, che è Iddio. Nullo sensibile in tutto lo mondo è più degno di farsi essempro di Dio che 'l sole."<sup>47</sup> Subsequently the ability to stare at intense light reflects an increase in knowledge of the divine and thus, figuratively, as man progresses on his spiritual journey he develops his capacity to cope with an excess of illumination.

Canto 23 of *Paradiso* introduces the sphere of the Fixed Stars that constitutes the final visible sphere according to Ptolemaic astronomy and marks the boundary between the visible and the invisible. The metaphorical construction that likens Beatrice to the bird condenses the dynamic allegorical function and thus the entire canto works as a prefiguration of the ultimate vision of God, though in a veiled and obscured form ("la notte che le cose ci nasconde" [Par. 23.3]).

### Admiring God: Richard of St. Victor and Dante

Richard of St. Victor "must be counted as the most significant of the Victorine mystics, both for the profundity of his thought and his subsequent influence on the later Western tradition."<sup>48</sup> He is the first author to have focused on the role of *ad-miratio* in perceiving God, linking it to the suspended mind. He is "le premier parmi les auteurs spirituels à avoir systématiquement mis en valeur le rôle de l'admiration dans la contemplation."<sup>49</sup> It is notable that Richard of St. Victor's connection between the topoi of *ad-miratio* and *suspensio mentis*, from a conceptual and lexical point of view, is almost identical to that in the thread found in Dante's *Paradiso*, and so it is highly likely that Dante was influenced by this source.

Dante-pilgrim meets Richard of St. Victor in *Paradiso*.<sup>50</sup> Appearing among the "wise" in the sphere of the Sun, Thomas of Aquinas describes him as the one "che a *considerar* fu più che viro":

Vedi oltre fiammeggiar l'ardente spiro  
d'Isidoro, di Beda e di Riccardo,  
che a *considerar* fu più che viro.  
(Par. 10.130–32)

The most famous work of Richard of St. Victor, *Benjamin maior*<sup>51</sup> (*De gratia contemplationis*), known in English as *The Mystical Ark*, is a manual of contemplation that was familiar to Dante and explicitly cited by him in the *Epistle to Cangrande*.<sup>52</sup>

And should these not satisfy the cavilers, let them read *Richard of St Victor in his book On Contemplation*; let them read Bernard in his book *On Consideration*; let them read Augustine in his book *On the Capacity of the Soul*; and they will cease from their caviling.<sup>53</sup>



In *Benjamin maior*, Richard develops the image of *ad-miratio*<sup>54</sup> while defining contemplation. On resuming the explanation given by his master Hugh of St. Victor,<sup>55</sup> besides detailing the nature of the free and penetrating gaze, Richard adds the theme of vision filled with astonishment:

Contemplation is the free, more penetrating gaze of a mind, *suspended with wonder* concerning manifestations of wisdom.<sup>56</sup>

*Benjamin maior* begins and ends with moments of wonder and, as with the *Commedia*, it is punctuated throughout by stages of admiration leading to the final ecstatic *crescendo*. Richard of St. Victor believes that to proceed from meditation to contemplation, the contemplator must remain in an extended moment of *ad-miratio* to enable ascension on the ladder of spiritual *sensorium*. These characteristics suggest a strong link between Dante's stages of admiration, which become purer and purer and increasingly intense, and the mystical theology of Victorine thought. For both authors, as in medieval allegorism, the reasoning behind the concept of *ad-miratio* is that through earthly beauty one can perceive divine beauty by way of the "spiritual senses."<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, Richard of St. Victor argues that *ad-miratio* is the mental process that enables the awareness of God in all living things.<sup>58</sup> The gaze of contemplation focuses on creation until the mind ascends from the tangible and proceeds along the spiritual path to the high point of affection and spiritual union. *Ad-miratio* works like a trampoline that throws the contemplator's gaze upward from the wonder of Creation to God by means of the mental process of allegoresis.

*Ad-miratio* arises from the distinction that the Victorine Abbot makes among *cogitatio*, *meditatio* and *contemplatio*.<sup>59</sup> The instant of *suspensio mentis* exists in the moment of passage from the meditative state to the contemplative state during an act of prolonged concentration.<sup>60</sup> Richard divides the act of contemplation into six *genera*, or stages.<sup>61</sup> They "represent an ascension in being, from the sensual world, perceived by the bodily senses and known to the mind through the imagination . . . to the transcendent world of spiritual realities."<sup>62</sup> The beginning of the spiritual journey is inspired by the nearest reality—tangible things that reflect *per specula* another reality and progress, like the rungs of a ladder, up to elevated reflections. As Gervais Dumeige has shown, *ad-miratio* is present in every stage of Richard's contemplative act, including the phases that do not lead to exceptional grace, even if the Abbot of St. Victor reserves a privileged kind of profound *ad-miratio* for the highest stages of the spiritual path.<sup>63</sup>

The depth of the *ad-miratio* determines the type of contemplation, the latter varying "according to the quality and quantity of our admiration."<sup>64</sup> Consequently the illumination of which the contemplator is capable is proportional to the intensity of the *ad-miratio*: "The more fully you delight by wondering and wonder by delighting, the more willingly you remain, the more carefully you examine and the more deeply you are illumined."<sup>65</sup> The first of the six kinds sets the foundations for the entire contemplative process and corresponds with the "luogo in cui il sensibile rivela, in una dialettica propriamente vittorina, la sua attitudine a condurre a Dio,"<sup>66</sup> which is triggered by consideration (*consideratio*)<sup>67</sup> and by wonder (*ad-miratio*) of corporeal things:

The first kind of contemplation is in consideration of and *wonder* at corporeal things with respect to all those which enter into the soul by means of the *five bodily senses*. ( . . . ) For those who are unlettered until now ought to begin with this, so that they may *gradually rise to higher things*, as it were by means of certain stages of advancement. And so, to this kind of contemplation pertains all wonder at the Creator, *wonder* that rises up from consideration of corporeal things.<sup>68</sup>

### Contemplating in metaphor: "Immobile flight"

The theme of "immobile flight"<sup>69</sup> denotes another important poetic correspondence between the authors. Following his definition of contemplation, Richard of St. Victor gives a further notable representation through a particular image of static, suspended flight that is concentrated on a single fixed point of fulfillment, a conception remarkably similar to what is evoked by the imagery of the *punto* at the end of Dante's *Commedia*. The flight metaphor, articulated in various forms using the terms wings and feathers, is central to the *Commedia*.<sup>70</sup> Richard defines the movement of contemplation as the state of free flight (*libero volatu*), which spins (*circumfertur*) with wondrous agility, unlike the crawling of the *cogitatio* and the marching of the *meditatio*:

*Contemplation, in free flight, circles around with marvelous quickness wherever impulse moves it. Thinking crawls; meditation marches and often runs; contemplation flies around everywhere and when it wishes suspends itself in the heights.*<sup>71</sup>

He describes moments that form in the soul of a contemplative ("in contemplantis animo") through a comparison with the hovering of birds

in which there is a particular kind of prolonged and “immobile flight” at a fixed suspended point:

You may see how others [birds of the sky] *suspended* themselves for a long time in one and the same place with beating and rapidly vibrating wings and fix themselves *motionless* by means of agitated motion, as it were. And they do not depart at all from the place where they are *suspended*, clinging closely for a long time.<sup>72</sup>

The definition of *contemplatio* that follows, with the exemplary image of the “immobile flight,” is part of a more extensive description (chapters 3–5 of the first book) of characteristics of contemplative practice. What emerges from the lexical framework is the constant coexistence of the semantic fields of *ad-miratio*, suspension, fixed gaze, and immobility. All these attributes combine with the enlargement of the mind (*dilatatio mentis*) to create the condition which Richard identifies, here and elsewhere in the text,<sup>73</sup> as full contemplative absorption.

Thus, three thematic elements—suspension, fixed gaze and immobility—and the corresponding linguistic terms emerge from the Victorine text. These same key elements characterize the visions of God both in Canto 23 and in Canto 33 of *Paradiso* (“suspendum” > “sospesa” [*Par.* 23.13 and 33.97]; “diutius” > “sempre” [*Par.* 33.99]; “immobiliter” > “immobile” [*Par.* 33.98]; “in uno eodemque loco” > “Un punto solo” [*Par.* 33.94]; “figunt” > “fiso guardando” [*Par.* 23.9] and “mirava fissa” [*Par.* 33.98]). Given that these images are rare, the lexical similarities attest to Dante’s deep knowledge and awareness of Ricardian topoi and metaphors which he incorporates into the images of Beatrice-bird and Argo’s shadow.

Come l’augello, intra l’amate fronde,  
[ . . . ]

E con ardente affetto il sole aspetta,  
*fiso guardando* pur che l’alba nasca;  
così la donna mia stava eretta  
e *attenta*, rivolta inver’ la plaga  
sotto la quale il sol mostra men fretta:  
sì che, veggendola io *sospesa* e vaga,  
fecimi qual è quei che distando  
altro vorria, e sperando s’appaga.

(*Par.* 23.1–15)

Un *punto* solo m’è maggior letargo  
che venticinque secoli a la ’mpresa  
che fé Nettuno *ammirar* l’ombra d’Argo.  
Così la *mente* mia, tutta *sospesa*,  
*mirava fissa*, *immobile* e *attenta*,  
e *sempre* di *mirar* faceasi *accesa*.

(*Par.* 33.94–99)

Contemplatio est libera *mentis*  
perspicacia in sapientiae spectacula  
*cum admiratione suspensa*  
(Benjamin maior 1.4)

Videre licet alia quomodo tremulis  
alis saepeque reverberatis se *in uno*  
*eodemque loco diutius suspendunt*,  
et mobili se agitatione quasi  
*immobiliter figunt*, et ab eodem  
*suspensionis* suae loco diu  
multumque *haerentia* penitus  
non recedunt

(Benjamin maior 1.5)

The undeniable affinity between the Ricardian text and Dante’s imagery is not limited to the lexical similarities of the suspended mind in the

fixed point (*punto*) of contemplative wonder, but also extends to the Victorine idea of the enlargement of the mind (*dilatatio mentis*),<sup>74</sup> which Dante employs in the verses immediately preceding the final point of admiration—

"credo ch'i' vidi, perché più di largo,  
dicendo questo, mi sento ch'i' godo."  
(*Par.* 33.92–93)

—and also previously in the metaphor of Beatrice-bird:

"la mente mia così, tra quelle dape  
fatta più grande, di sé stessa uscìo,  
e che si fesse rimembrar non sape."  
(*Par.* 23.43–45)

The metaphorical fields in which Richard of St. Victor describes the enlargement of the soul and the particular *modes* of contemplation that arise from great wonder are precisely those that Dante employs with rigor and consistency in his configuration of the vision of God.

### Contemplating in metaphor: Expressing divine illumination

The avian metaphor of "immobile flight" in a fixed point of wonder appears in the first book of *Benjamin maior* and again in the final part of the work where Richard of St. Victor describes the kind of spiritual practice that occurs at the perception of God. Ecstasy is generated by an excess of wonder and admiration that expands the mind and triggers the climax of contemplation.<sup>75</sup> For Richard, the state of supreme ecstasy, which is literally the transcending of the mind itself, is reached by great admiration in which cognitive faculty comes to a standstill during an intense act of visual concentration, expressed metaphorically as suspended flight. This sudden sensation "strikes" the mind to such an extent that it elevates it into a higher dimension, releasing it from an attachment to earthly things:

By *greatness of wonder* the human soul is led above itself when, as it is irradiated by divine light and *suspended in wonder* at supreme beauty, it is shaken with such overpowering awe that it is utterly driven out of its state. In the manner of *flashing lightning*, the more deeply the soul is cast down into the depths by despising itself

with regard to that invisible beauty, the more sublimely, the more quickly it is elevated *to sublime things* when it rebounds by means of the *desire* [for] highest things and is carried away above itself.<sup>76</sup>

The experience of ecstasy (*excessus mentis*) is represented in *Benjamin maior* by a mind which, through visual admiration, transcends the levels of consciousness and eventually reaches a state of suspension in contemplation of the intelligible. The soul, full of *ad-miratio*, “gradually advances” toward God “like the dawn” (cf. the metaphor of Beatrice-bird, “fiso guardando pur che l’alba nasca” [*Par.* 23.9]):

The *mind* that, *on account of the wonder of a vision, gradually advances* to an increase of knowledge rises up *like the dawn*. Indeed, the dawn arises little by little—and as it is raised it is *enlarged*, and as it is *enlarged* it is brightened. But in a marvelous manner when at last the dawn ceases at the day, it comes to a fading away because of the increase of its advance. So that it may be greater, it receives that whereby it comes near to day, and finally fades away so that it is nothing. So, in any event, when the human understanding has been irradiated by divine light, while it is *suspended* in the contemplation of intelligible things and *stretched out in wonder* at these things, the more it is always led to *higher or more marvelous things*; the more widely and fully it is *enlarged*. The more remote it is from lower things, the purer it is found to be in itself and the more sublime with regard to sublime things. But in a *raising up* of this sort, while the human mind always makes progress towards higher things and by daily progressing *finally goes beyond the bounds of human capacity* at some time, at last, it happens that it completely fails with respect to itself and, *being transformed into a certain kind of supermundane affection*, goes completely above itself.<sup>77</sup>

This passage has some remarkable parallels with that which, in *De quatuor gradibus violentae caritatis*,<sup>78</sup> Richard identifies as the third degree of Violent Charity in which the human mind, rapt in the divine light, transfers to God. Interestingly, in describing it Richard emphasizes the nature of its immobility (“dissolvit actionem,” “*mens itaque in hoc statu quasi immobilis manet*”) and the idea of surpassing cognitive capabilities (“*humanae possibilitatis metas semel excessit*”) through the experience of *ad-miratio* during ecstasy (“*prae admirationis magnitudine*”). The final canto of *Commedia* highlights these same concepts of attention (*attentio*) and of an insatiable longing on the part of the pilgrim to reach the ecstatic climax of the divine journey.<sup>79</sup> Dante’s mind is “*sempre di mirar . . . accesa*” (*Par.* 33.99), illuminated by attention and wonder:

così la donna mia stava eretta e <i>attenta</i> (Par. 23.10–11)	Così la mente mia, tutta sospesa, <i>mirava</i> fissa, immobile e <i>attenta</i> (Par. 33.97–98)	Sed rei novitatem quanto magis <i>miramur</i> , tanto <i>diligentius attendimus</i> ; et quanto <i>attentius perspicimus</i> , tanto plenius <i>cognoscimus</i> . <i>Crescit itaque ex admiratione</i> <i>attentio</i> , et <i>ex attentione</i> cognitio. ( <i>Benjamin maior</i> 5.9) <sup>80</sup>
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The lexical similarities are strengthened by thematic overlapping: the parallel descriptions of both authors in fact coincide at the high point of affection (*apex affectionis*)<sup>81</sup> which stems from a superabundance of *ad-miratio* just before the moment of inexplicable spiritual revelation (*fulminatio*).

The lexical, theological, thematic and structural similarities shared by the two authors are not casual or incidental but pronounced, as the examples in the table below make clear: the dream-like dimension; the sweetness of the divine vision (*dulcedo*); the contrast between darkness and light (*umbra lucis, lux tenebrosa*); the enlargement and elevation of the mind (*dilatatio* and *sublevatio mentis*); the dawn metaphor which anticipates eternity and the final "circular metaphor," which articulates the contemplation of God. Even though in the moment of transcendence Dante and Richard seem to lose their perception of the world around them and their cognitive ability appears no longer active—"it happens that it [the mind] completely fails with respect to itself"<sup>82</sup> and "sarei smarrito" (Par. 33.77)—nevertheless they manage to maintain an "affective approach" to contemplation and individual awareness. For Richard the mind is "transformed into a certain kind of *supermundane affection*,"<sup>83</sup> while Dante emphasizes the feeling of longing and free will ("il mio disio e 'l velle" [Par. 33.143]). Subsequently both authors are able to recollect the experience of God when the mind returns to itself.

A final salient correspondence between these two celebrated authors deserves attention, namely their use of the same image to express divine illumination. Richard of St. Victor depicts a ray of sunlight penetrating a vase of water to symbolize the contemplator's mind at the climax of contemplation, its heat causing the water to evaporate. Dante employs an analogous image of a vase of water to represent the mind of the pilgrim in the sphere of the Sun, not coincidentally the locus where he meets Richard of St. Victor. Finally, in the last canto, Dante describes the

moment of tactile union with God as a stroke of lightning that stuns his sensorial capacities and disables his vision, which is the very image that Richard employs in describing the highest point of mystical ascension. Both authors, in fact, use an equivalent term (Lat. “excussa” and It. “percossa” < cf. “percosso”) to portray the mind being struck by divine light.

Dal centro al cerchio, e sì dal cerchio al centro  
movesi l'*acqua in* un ritondo *vaso*,  
secondo ch'è *percosso* fuori o dentro

(Par. 14.1–3)

se non che la mia *mente* fu *percossa*  
da un *fulgore* in che sua voglia venne

(Par. 33.140–41)

*Aqua in vase* collecta, cogitatio  
meditationi intenta, et per intentionem  
*defixa*. Aquae collectio, cordis  
meditatio. Eiusmodi aquae *solis radius*  
se infundit, quando divina revelatio  
meditationi occurrit. Sed cum aqua  
radium in se superni luminis accipit,  
*fulgorem* quoque luminis et ipsa, ut  
dictum est, *ad superiora emittit*, et  
mirum in modum illuc utique radium  
luminis *ex se levat*, quo ipsa per se nullo  
modo *ascendere* valet. [ . . . ] Et quo  
*mentem* hominis divinae claritatis  
*splendor* profundius penetrat, eo altius  
stuporis sui magnitudine *excussa*, et per  
extasim *sublevata*, in divinorum  
arcanorum sublimibus sublimius resultat.  
(*Benjamin maior* 5.11).<sup>84</sup>

The influence of *Benjamin maior* is also truly notable for being the source of the suggestive metaphor of water moving from the circumference of a round vase to its “centro,” the ideal point at which *deus geometra*<sup>85</sup> fixes the pivot of his compass in the cosmic order. For Dante-pilgrim this impenetrable “punto solo” (Par. 33.94) is a greater source of wonder and bewilderment than the twenty-five centuries that have passed since Neptune first viewed Argo’s shadow. This is the last in an escalating succession of visual moments of surprise and wonder that represent the first step in the journey toward the vision of God. In mapping the ascension to the absolute, Dante’s deployment of *ad-miratio* constitutes an essential part of the “aesthetic of rare experience”<sup>86</sup> that permeates the subjective mysticism of Ricardian thought.

(Translated from the Italian by Dr. Alice Bourke)

Università degli Studi di Roma “La Sapienza”  
Rome, Italy

## Appendix

Paradiso 23

Paradiso 33

Benjamin maior

### DREAM-LIKE DIMENSION

Io era come quei che si risente di  
*visione obliterata* e che s'ingegna  
indarno di ridurlasi a la *mente*  
(49–51)

Qual è colui che *sognando* vede,  
che dopo 'l *sogno* la passione  
impressa rimane, e l'altro a la  
*mente* non riede, cotal son io, ché  
quasi tutta cessa mia *visione* . . .  
(58–62)

4.22: "humana *mens* ab illa divini  
luminis immensitate absorpta,  
*summa sui oblivione sopitur*"

("human *mind*, having been  
engrossed by the boundlessness of  
divine light, is put into a *state of*  
*sleep* with supreme forgetfulness  
of self")

### THE SWEETNESS OF GOD (DULCEDO)

Se mo sonasser tutte quelle lingue  
che Polimnia con le suore fero del  
latte lor *dolcissimo* più pingue,  
(55–57)

. . . e ancor mi distilla nel  
*core* il *dolce* che nacque da essa  
(62–63)

5.5: "tanta intimae *dulcedinis* suae  
suavitate, *cordis* tui desiderium  
inebriaret"

("inebriate the longing of your  
*heart* with so much pleasantness of  
His intimate *sweetness*")

### LIGHT MIXED WITH DARKNESS (UMBRA LUCIS)

la *notte* che le cose ci nasconde  
(3)

. . . tutti miei prieghi ti  
porgo, e priego che non sieno  
scarsi, perché tu ogni *nube* li  
dislegghi di sua mortalità co'  
prieghi tuoi  
(29–32)

4.22: "ita ut *mirari* valeas et iuste  
*mirari* debeas quomodo concordet  
ibi *nubes cum igne*, et *ignis cum*  
*nube*: *nubes* ignorantiae, cum *nube*  
illuminatae intelligentiae"

Come *foco di nube* si diserra  
(40)

vider, coverti d'*ombra*, li occhi  
miei

Un punto solo m'è maggior  
(81) letargo che venticinque secoli a la  
'mpresa che fè Nettuno *ammirar*  
l'*ombra* d'Argo  
(94–96)

("So you can *marvel*, and you  
ought justly to *marvel*, how there  
the *cloud* harmonizes with the *fire*,  
and the *fire with the cloud*: the  
*cloud* of ignorance with the fire of  
illuminated understanding")

parrebbe *nube* che squarciata tona  
(99)

5.2: "Quid enim est ad divinae  
vocationis accessum *nebulam*  
intrare nisi mente excedere, et per  
*oblivionis nebulam* quasi in  
adiacentium memoriam mente  
caligare? Ad idem respicit quod  
discipulos Christi *nubes lucida*  
*obumbravit*"

("For what does it mean to go *into*  
a *cloud* on the occasion of the  
divine calling except to go into  
ecstasy of mind and to be *darkened*  
in the mind concerning the  
memory of nearby things by a



**cloud** of forgetting, as it were? It concerns the same mode of contemplating that a **luminous cloud overshadowed** the disciples of Christ”)

5.9: “Habet itaque ipsa admiratio *lucem subitam tenebrisque permistam*, lucem visionis, cum quibusdam reliquiis incredulitatis, *ambiguitatisque tenebris*”

(“And so wonder itself has sudden *light mixed with darkness*, a light of vision together with remnants of incredulity and *the darkness of uncertainty*”)

### ENLARGEMENT OF THE MIND (*DILATATIO MENTIS*)

Come foco di nube si diserra  
**per dilatarsi** sì che non vi cape  
(40–41)

La forma universal di questo nodo  
credo ch’i’ vidi, perché **più di**  
**largo**, dicendo questo, mi sento  
ch’i’ godo

5.2: “Mentis *dilatatio* est quando animi acies **latius expanditur** et vehementius acuitur”

(91–93) (“**Enlarging** of the mind is when the sharp point of the soul is **expanded** more widely and is sharpened more intensely”)

5.9: “Aurora siquidem paulatim elevatur, elevando *dilatatur*, *dilatando* clarificatur”; “dum in . . . admiratione *distenditur*, quanto semper ad altiora vel mirabiliora ducitur, tanto amplius, tanto copiosius *dilatatur*”

(“Indeed, the dawn arises little by little— and as it is raised it **is enlarged**, and as it **is enlarged** it is brightened”; “while it is suspended in the contemplation of intellectible things and stretched out in wonder at these things, the more it is always led to higher or more marvelous things; the more widely and fully it is **enlarged**”)

### ELEVATING THE MIND (*SUBLEVATIO*)

e fuor di sua natura in giù s’atterra,  
la **mente** mia così, tra quelle dape  
*fatta più grande, di sé stessa uscìo*, e  
che si fesse rimembrar non sape  
(42–45)

5.2: “*Mentis sublevatio* est quando intelligentiae vivacitas divinitus irradiata humanae industriae metas transcendit, nec tamen in mentis alienationem transit, ita ut et *supra se* sit quod videat”

("Raising up of the mind is when the vivacity of the understanding, being divinely irradiated, *transcends* the bond of human activity; nevertheless it does not pass over into alienation of mind, so that what it sees is above it")

## WAITING FOR DAWN

fiso guardando pur che l'alba  
nasca;  
così la donna mia stava eretta  
(9–10)

5.9: "Mens itaque velut *aurora* consurgit, quae ex visionis admiratione paulatim ad incrementa cognitionis proficit. *Aurora* siquidem paulatim elevatur"

("The mind that, on account of the wonder of a vision, gradually advances to an increase of knowledge rises up *like the dawn*")

## AD-MIRATIO AND SUSPENDED MIND (SUSPENSIO MENTIS)

fiso guardando pur che l'alba nasca; Un punto solo m'è maggior letargo  
così la donna mia stava eretta che venticinque secoli a la 'mpresa  
[ . . . ] che fè Nettuno ammirar l'ombra  
sì che, veggendola io sospesa e d'Argo. Così la mente mia, tutta  
vaga sospesa, mirava fissa, immobile e  
(9–13) attenta, e sempre di mirar faceasi  
accesa

(94–99)

1.4: "Contemplatio est libera mentis perspicacia in sapientiae spectacula cum admiratione suspensa"

("Contemplation is the free, more penetrating gaze of a mind, *suspended with wonder* concerning manifestations of wisdom")

1.5: "Videre licet alia alia [volatiles] quomodo tremulis alis saepeque reverberatis se in uno eodemque loco diutius suspendunt, et mobili se agitatione quasi immobiliter figunt, et ab eodem suspensionis suae loco diu multumque haerentia penitus non recedunt"

("You may see how others [birds of the sky] *suspended* themselves for a long time in one and the same place with beating and rapidly vibrating wings and *fix* themselves *motionless* by means of agitated motion, as it were. And they do not depart at all from the place where they are *suspended*, clinging closely for a long time")

5.5: "Magnitudine *admirationis* anima humana supra semetipsam ducitur, quando divino lumine irradiata, et in summae pulchritudinis *admiratione suspensa*"

("By greatness of *wonder* the human soul is led above itself when, as it is irradiated by divine light and *suspended in wonder* at supreme beauty")

### ATTENTION (*ATTENTIO*) AND INSATIABLE LONGING

così la donna mia stava eretta  
e *attenta* . . .

(10–11)

Così la mente mia, tutta sospesa,  
*mirava* fissa, immobile e *attenta*

(97–98)

5.9: "Sed rei novitatem quanto magis *miramur*, tanto diligentius *attendimus*; et quanto *attentius* perspicimus, tanto plenius cognoscimus. Crescit itaque *ex admiratione attentio*, et *ex attentione cognitio*"

("But the more greatly we marvel at the newness of a thing, the more carefully we pay *attention* to it. The more *attentively* we look, the more fully we come to know. And so *attention* increases on account of *wonder* and knowing increases on account of *attention*")

### STROKE OF LIGHTNING (*FULMINATIO*)

Come a *raggio di sol*, che puro  
mei  
per fratta nube, già prato di fiori  
vider, coverti d'ombra, li occhi  
miei;  
vid'io così più turbe di *splendori*,  
*folgorate* di sù da *raggi* ardenti,  
sanza veder principio di *folgóri*.

(79–84)

se non che la mia *mente* fu *percossa*  
da un *fulgore* in che sua voglia  
venne

(140–141)

5.11: "*Aqua in vase* collecta, cogitatio meditationi intenta, et per intentionem defixa. Aquae collectio, cordis meditatio. Eiusmodi aquae *solis radius* se infundit, quando divina revelatio meditationi occurrit. Sed cum aqua *radius* in se superni luminis accipit, *fulgorem* quoque luminis et ipsa ( . . . ) *ad superiora* emittit et mirum in modum illuc utique *radius luminis* ex se levat. . . . et illuc intelligentiae *radius divini luminis* infusione admirationisque reverberatione de imis ad summa resilit . . . et quo *mentem* hominis divinae claritatis *splendor* profundius penetrat, eo altius stuporis sui magnitudine *excussa*, et per *extasim* sublevata in divinorum arcanorum sublimibus sublimius resultat"

Cf.

. . . e sì dal cerchio al  
centro  
movesi l'*acqua in* un ritondo *vaso*,  
secondo ch'è *percosso* fuori o  
dentro

(Par. 14.1–3)

("Water that has been collected in a container represents thinking

that is directed towards meditation and fixed by intention. The gathering together of water represents meditation of the heart. A *ray of the sun* directs itself onto such water when a divine showing meets with meditation. But when the water receives in itself the ray of light from above, it sends a *flash of light* to the very heights . . . and in a marvelous manner assuredly raises a ray of light from itself to that place to which it is not able to ascend in any way by itself. . . . By an infusion of *divine light* and a rebound of wonder, the ray of understanding springs back from the lowest region to the highest . . . the *brightness* of divine brilliance penetrates the human *mind shaken* and *raised up by ecstasy*, the higher it springs back to the very heights of divine secrets")

### CONTEMPLATING GOD: A CIRCLE OF LOVE

per entro il cielo scese una facella, formata <i>in cerchio</i> a guisa di corona, e cinsela e girossi intorno ad ella (94–96)	Quella <i>circulazion</i> che sì concetta pareva in te come lume riflesso (127–128)	1.3: "Contemplatio libero volatu quocunque eam fert impetus mira agilitate <i>circumfertur</i> . Contemplatio autem omnia <i>circumvolat</i> , et cum voluerit se in summis librat"
"Io sono amore angelico, che giro l'alta letizia che spira del ventre che fu albergo del nostro disiro; e girerommi, donna del ciel, mentre che seguirai tuo figlio, e farai dia più la spera suprema perché li entre." Così la <i>circulata</i> melodia . . . (103–109)	Qual è 'l geomètra che tutto s'affige per misurar lo <i>cerchio</i> , e non ritrova, pensando, quel principio ond'elli indige, tal era io a quella vista nova: veder voleva come si convenne l'imago al <i>cerchio</i> e come vi s'indova (133–138)	("Contemplation, in free flight, <i>circles around</i> with marvelous quickness wherever impulse moves it. Thinking crawls; meditation marches and often runs; contemplation <i>flies around</i> everywhere and when it wishes suspends itself in the heights")

### NOTES

1. The text of the *Commedia* is cited from the critical edition of Giorgio Petrocchi, *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata*, 4 vols. (1966–67; repr., Florence: Le Lettere, 1994); italics added.
2. The bibliography on Canto 33 of *Paradiso* is vast. See, in particular, Lino Pertile, "Paradiso XXXIII: l'estremo oltraggio," *Filologia e critica* 6 (1981): 1–21; Peter Dronke, "The Conclusion of Dante's *Commedia*," *Italian Studies* 49 (1994): 21–39; Piero Boitani, "Le foglie di Sibilla: leggendo il canto XXXIII del *Paradiso*," *Il tragico e il sublime nella letteratura medievale* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1992): 315–50; Georges Güntert, "Canto XXXIII," *Lectura Dantis Turicensis*. *Paradiso*, ed. Georges Güntert and Michelangelo Picone (Florence: Franco Cesati Editore, 2002): 505–18; Raffaele Pinto, "Il viaggio di ritorno: Pd. XXXIII, 142–145," *Tenzone* 4 (2003): 199–226; Richard Kay, "Dante in Ecstasy: *Paradiso* 33 and Bernard of Clairvaux," *Mediaeval Studies* 76 (2004): 183–212; Juan Varela-Portas de Orduña, "L'ombra della luce: Poetica della memoria o poetica della reminiscenza?" *Tenzone* 6 (2005):

249–71; Marco Ariani, “La forma universal di questo nodo: Paradiso, XXXIII 58–105,” *Lectura Dantis Scaligera 2005–2007*, ed. Ennio Sandal (Rome: Salerno, 2008): 137–181; Gino Casagrande, “Le teofanie di Paradiso XXXIII,” *Studi Danteschi* 74 (2009): 199–224; Luca Azzetta, “La geometria e il volto—Paradiso XXXII–XXXIII,” in *Esperimenti danteschi: ‘Paradiso’ 2010*, ed. Tommaso Montorfano (Genoa: Marietti, 2010): 311–50; and Gioia Paradisi, “Icône nella parola: il ‘volume’ ‘legato con amore’ (Pd 33, 86),” *Dante, oggi / 2*, ed. R. Antonelli, A. Landolfi, A. Punzi [= *Critica del testo* 14 (2011)]: 349–387.

3. See Manuela Colombo, *Dai mistici e Dante: il linguaggio dell’ineffabilità* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1987); Angelo Jacomuzzi, “Il topos dell’ineffabile nel Paradiso,” in *L’imago al cerchio e altri studi sulla ‘Divina Commedia’* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1995): 78–113; Giuseppe Ledda, *La guerra della lingua. Ineffabilità, retorica e narrativa nella Commedia di Dante* (Ravenna: Longo, 2002); and Giampiero Tulone, “‘Qual è colui che sognando vede.’ Immagini e memoria nella *Commedia*,” in *Attraverso il sogno: Dal tema alla narrazione*, ed. Elena Porciani (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2003): 13–49.

4. See Ernst Robert Curtius, “Das Schiff der Argonauten,” in *Kritische Essays zur europäischen Literatur* (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1963<sup>3</sup>): 412–37, esp. 432.

5. See Corrado Bologna, “Il ‘punto’ che ‘vinse’ Dante in Paradiso,” *Critica del testo* 6 (2003): 59–87 (with previous bibliography); and Christian Moevs, “‘Il punto che mi vinse’: Incarnation, Revelation, and Self-knowledge in Dante’s *Commedia*,” in *Dante’s Commedia: Theology as Poetry*, ed. Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010): 267–85.

6. Peter Dronke, *The Medieval Poet and His World* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1984), esp. 431–38.

7. For the theme of light mixed with darkness see Marco Ariani, see “‘Abyssus luminis’: Dante e la veste della luce,” *Rivista di letteratura italiana* 11 (1993): 9–71; and Mira Mocan, “‘Lucem demonstrat umbra’: La serie rimica *ombra*; *adombra* e il lessico artistico fra Dante e Petrarca,” *Dante, oggi / 2*, ed. R. Antonelli, A. Landolfi, A. Punzi [= *Critica del testo*, 14 (2011)]: 389–423.

8. See *Dictionnaire de spiritualité: Ascétique et mystique, doctrine et histoire* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1988), s.v. “Admiration”: “L’admiration est le sentiment qui résulte d’une vive perception de la beauté physique ou morale, de la grandeur, de la bonté, réalisées à un degré supérieur. Elle comporte souvent, du moins au premier contact avec l’objet, une nuance d’étonnement; cela est vrai surtout pour le mot latin, qui marque quelquefois simplement la surprise . . . ou encore la stupeur, un certain désarroi mental devant l’inattendu ou l’inexpliqué.”

9. On sensual metaphors within Dante’s *Commedia* see Marco Ariani, “Dante, la *dulcedo* e la dottrina dei *sensi spirituali*,” in *Miscellanea di studi in onore di Claudio Varese*, ed. Claudio Varese and Giorgio Cerboni Baiardi (Rome: Vecchiarelli, 2001): 113–139. See also Valentina Atturo, “Il Paradiso dei sensi: Per una metaforologia sinestetica in Dante,” in *Dante, oggi / 2*, 425–64.

10. The English translation of the *Commedia* is taken from *The Divine Comedy*, trans. Charles S. Singleton, Bollingen Series, 6 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973).

11. For the possible influence of Ricardian prose on the *Commedia*, see, above all, Mira Mocan, “Ulisse, Arnaut e Riccardo di San Vittore: convergenze figurali e richiami lessicali nella *Commedia*,” *Lettere Italiane* 57 (2005): 173–208; and *La presenza di Riccardo di San Vittore nella ‘Commedia’* (forthcoming). See also Valentina Atturo, “‘Così la mente mia, tutta sospesa, / mirava fissa, immobile e attenta’: genesi e articolazioni dell’ad-miratio dantesca (Pd. 33, 94–99),” *Critica del testo* 13 (2010): 59–107; and Giuseppe Mazzotta, “Canti XXI–XXII. Contemplazione e Poesia,” *Esperimenti danteschi: ‘Paradiso’ 2010*, 201–12; and Francesco Zambon, “Canti XXV–XXVI. La scrittura d’amore,” *Esperimenti danteschi: ‘Paradiso’ 2010*, 247–68.

12. For interpretations of Richard of St. Victor’s theory of meditation and contemplation see Joseph Ebner, *Die Erkenntnislehre Richards von St. Viktor*, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters, Texte und Untersuchungen (Monaco: Aschendorff, 1919); Jean Châtillon, “Richard de Saint-Victor,” in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*; Kurt Ruh, *Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik, Band 1, Die Grundlegung durch die Kirchenväter und die Mönchstheologie des 12. Jahrhunderts* (Monaco: Beck, 1990); Steven Chase, *Angelic Wisdom: The Cherubim and the Grace of Contemplation in Richard of St. Victor* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 1995); Marc-Aeilko Aris, *Contemplatio*.

*Philosophische Studien zum Traktat Benjamin maior des Richard von St. Victor* (Frankfurt: Josef Knecht, 1996): [3]–[148]; Nico Den Bok, *Communicating the Most High: A Systematic Study of Person and Trinity in the Theology of Richard de St. Victor* (Paris: Brepols, 1996); Pierluigi Cacciapuoti, "Deus existentia amoris": Teologia della carità e teologia della Trinità negli scritti di Riccardo di San Vittore (Paris: Brepols, 1998); and Dominique Poirel and Patrice Sicard, "Figure vittorine: Riccardo, Acardo e Tommaso," *Figure del pensiero medievale*, II, *La fioritura della dialettica. X-XII secolo*, ed. Inos Biffi and Costante Marabelli (Rome: Città nuova, 2005): 459–537.

13. On "circular metaphor" see G. Mazzotta, *Dante's Vision and the Circle of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), esp. 207–209; Paolo Canettieri, "Geometrie dantesche: il cerchio," *Anticomodemo* 1 (1995): 163–74, esp. 168; and Corrado Bologna, *Il ritorno di Beatrice: Simmetrie dantesche fra Vita Nova, "Petrose" e Commedia* (Rome: Salerno, 1998): 12–17. On "centro" in the structure of the *Commedia*, see Arianna Punzi, "Centro e centri nella *Commedia*," *Anticomodemo* 4 (1999): 73–89.

14. For the function of rhymes in Dante's *Commedia* according to the techniques of *ars memoriae*, see Roberto Antonelli, "Come (e perché) Dante ha scritto la *Divina Commedia*?" in *Dante, oggi* / 1, 3–23. First published, in a previous version, in "Estaba el jardín en flor": *Homenaje a Stefano Arata* [= *Crítico* 87–88–89 (2003)]: 35–45.

15. Romans 1:20: "Invisibilia enim ipsius, a creatura mundi, per ea, quae facta sunt, intellecta conspiciuntur."

16. See *ad locum* Dante Alighieri, *Commedia*, vol. 3 *Paradiso*, ed. Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi. (Milan: Mondadori, 1997). Italics original.

17. *Purg.* 2.118–20: "Noi eravam tutti fissi e attenti / a le sue note; ed ecco il veglio onesto / gridando: 'Che è ciò, spiriti lenti?'"

18. Boitani, "Le foglie di Sibilla: leggendo il canto XXXIII del *Paradiso*," 388.

19. Caroline Walker Bynum, "Wonder," *The American Historical Review* 102 (1997): 1–26, esp. 6.

20. See Alois Walde and Johann Baptist Hofmann, *Lateinisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 3 vols. (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1938–56<sup>3</sup>), s.v. "MĪRUS, -A, -UM"; and Alfred Ernout—Antoine Meillet, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine: Histoire des mots* (Paris: C. Klincksieck, 1959<sup>4</sup>), s.v. "MĪRUS, -A, -UM".

21. See Egidio Forcellini, *Lexicon totius latinitatis* (Padua: Arnaldus Forni excudebat bononiae gregoriana edente, 1940), s.v. "ADMĪROR": "proprie est iuxta miror, h. e. de objecta aliqua re nova aut insolita vel inexpectata miror, aut valde miror, utramque enim significationem inferre potest particula *ad*."

22. *Ibid.*, 69–71, esp. 69, s.v. "ĀD": "quaque proprie nomen est propinquitatem et viciniam designans" (author's italics).

23. See Julius Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 2 vols. (Bern: Francke, 1989<sup>2</sup>), s.v. "\*(s)mei-."

24. For the concept of "absolute metaphor," see Hans Blumenberg, *Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1981), It. trans., *Paradigmi per una metaforologia* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1969) and *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt* (1981), It. trans., *La leggibilità del mondo: Il libro come metafora della natura* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1984).

25. Gilbert Durand, *Les structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire: Introduction à l'archétypologie générale* (1963), It. trans., *Le strutture antropologiche dell'immaginario. Introduzione all'archetipologia generale*, new ed. (Bari: Edizioni Dedalo, 2009), esp. 149–73, "I simboli ascensionali."

26. *Ibid.*, 151.

27. See *ad locum* Dante Alighieri, *Commedia*, vol. 3 *Paradiso*, ed. Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi.

28. The verb *ammirare* occurs in *Purgatorio* (4.14, 56; 7.61; 10.68; 15.47; 23.20, 37; 25.76; 28.89; 32.42) and in *Paradiso* (1.98, 136; 2.17; 6.91; 20.87; 28.127, 137; 33.96); the noun *ammirazione* occurs three times in *Purgatorio* (21.123; 24.5; 29.55) and three times in *Paradiso* (1.98; 2.56; 32.92).

29. *Purg.* 4.14, 56; 7.61.

30. *Purg.* 23.20; 24.5.

31. *Purg.* 25.76; 28.89; *Par.* 1.98.

32. *Par.* 2.17.
33. *Purg.* 29.55; *Par.* 20.87; 32.92; 33.96.
34. Franco Ferrucci, "Poetica dello stupore," *Dante. Lo stupore e l'ordine* (Naples: Liguori, 2007): 271–74, esp. 273–74.
35. See Pierre Courcelle, "Le péché de curiosité: Augustin et Apulée," in *Les "Confessions" de Saint Augustin dans la tradition littéraire. Antécédents et postérité* (Paris: Etudes augustiniennes, 1963): 101–109 and Maria Tassinato, *La curiosità. Apuleio e Agostino* (Trent: Luni, 2000).
36. See Peters Hawkins, "Are you Here? Surprise in the *Commedia*," *Sparks and Seeds: Medieval Literature and Its Aftermath*, ed. Dana Stewart and Alison Cornish (Tournhout: Brepols, 2000): 175–97.
37. *Inf.* 15.22–24; 23.124–26; 28.52–54, 64–67; *Purg.* 2.67–69, 80–82; 3.67–69; 5.1–9; 7.10–15; 14.10–15; 16.31–33; 21.121–23; 23.55–60; 28.34–42; *Par.* 3.25–28.
38. *Inf.* 16.130–132; 25.46–48, 34.37–38.
39. *Purg.* 1.133–35; *Par.* 11.76–81, 88–93.
40. *Inf.* 18, 133–35; *Purg.* 14.103–4; *Par.* 15.127–29, 27.139–141.
41. *Inf.* 14.128–29; *Purg.* 3.28–30; 27.77–82, 115–17; *Par.* 1.139–41; 5.1–6; 10.46–47; 19.82–84; 20.100–102; 28.58–60.
42. *Purg.* 15.10–12; 30.32–39; *Par.* 29.55–57; 31.31–40, 127, etc.
43. *Conv.* 4.25. Cited from Dante Alighieri, *Convivio*, ed. Franca Brambilla Ageno (Florence: Le Lettere, 1995), 2:422–23.
44. The similarities between Beatrice-bird metaphor and the spiritual path of Richard of St. Victor are analyzed by Juan Varela-Portas de Orduña, "Un símil estructural del *Paradiso*: el símil-resumen del pájaro que espera (*Par.* XXIII, 1–12)," *Tenzzone* 8 (2007): 181–202. See also Manuela Colombo, "Il XXIII Canto del *Paradiso* e il *Benjamin Major* di Riccardo da San Vittore," *Dai mistici a Dante*, 61–71, and Stephen Jaeger, "Humanism and Ethics at the School of St. Victor in the Early Twelfth Century," *Mediaeval Studies* 55 (1993): 51–79.
45. On the theory of light, see Simon A. Gilson, *Medieval Optics and Theories of Light in the Works of Dante* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000), which includes bibliographical references.
46. Rebecca S. Beal, "Beatrice in the Sun: A Vision from Apocalypse," *Dante Studies* 103 (1985): 57–78, here 57.
47. *Conv.* 3.12.7.
48. Bernard McGinn, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, vol. 2 of *The Growth of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2004): 398.
49. Ives, *Épître à Severin sur la charité*. Richard de Saint Victor, *Les quatre degrés de la violente charité*, ed. Gervais Dumeige (Paris: Vrin, 1955): 11.
50. See Grover A. Zinn, *Richard of St. Victor: the Twelve Patriarchs; the Mystical Ark; Book Three of the Trinity*, in the series "The Classics of Western Spirituality" (New York: Paulist Press, 1979): 1; and Gervais Dumeige, *Richard de Saint-Victor et l'idée chrétienne de l'amour* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1952): 159: "Dante . . . in his *Paradiso* (Canto X) spoke of having seen, flaming, at the side of Isidore and of Bede, the ardent soul of Richard, *che a considerar fu più che viro*."
51. Richard von St. Victor, *De contemplatione [Benjamin maior]*, ed. Marc-Aeilko Aris. Appendix to *Contemplatio*. The Latin texts of most of Richard's works are found in: *Richardi a Sancto Victore Opera Omnia*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne (PL 196.63B–202B). I quote the Latin text of *Benjamin maior* from the edition by Aris.
52. The bibliography on the *Epistola a Cangrande* is extensive and the question of its authorship problematic. See in particular Gianfranco Contini, *Un'idea di Dante: Saggi danteschi* (Turin: Einaudi, 1976), esp. 39; Francesco Mazzoni, *Contributi di filologia dantesca* (Florence: Sansoni, 1966): 7–37; Giorgio Padoan, *Il pio Enea, l'empio Ulisse: Tradizione classica e intendimento medievale* (Ravenna: Longo, 1977): 30–63; Zygmunt G. Barański, "Comedia: Notes on Dante, the Epistle to Cangrande, and Medieval Comedy," *Lectura Dantis* 8 (1991): 26–55; Dante Alighieri, *Epistola a Cangrande*, ed. Enzo Cecchini (Florence: Giunti, 1995): VIII–XXV; Robert Hollander, *Dante's "Epistle to Cangrande"* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993); *Seminario dantesco internazionale. International Dante Seminar I*, Atti del primo Convegno tenutosi al Chauncey Conference Center, Princeton, 21–23 ottobre 1994, ed. Zygmunt G. Barański (Florence: Le Lettere, 1997). See also, on the question,

Serene Sarteschi, "L'Epistola XIII a Cangrande della Scala: osservazioni sul titolo *Comedia* e sulla polisemia del poema," *Rivista di letteratura italiana* 13 (1996): 25–77; and "Ancora in merito all'Epistola XII a Cangrande della Scala," *L'Alighieri* 26 (2005): 63–96; Luca Azzetta, "Le chiose alla '*Commedia*' di Andrea Lancia, l'*Epistola a Cangrande* e altre questioni dantesche," *L'Alighieri* 21 (2003): 5–76; Zygmunt G. Barański, "The Epistle to Can Grande," *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, ed. by Alastair Minnis and Ian Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 583–89 and Robert Hollander, "The Epistle to Cangrande and Albert Ascoli's Recent Book on Dante," *Electronic Bulletin of the Dante Society of America* (August 2008) on-line at [www.princeton.edu/~dante/](http://www.princeton.edu/~dante/).

53. *Epist.* 28.77: "Et ubi ista invidis non sufficient, legant Richardum de Sancto Victore in libro *De Contemplatione*, legant Bernardum in libro *De Consideratione*, legant Augustinum in libro *De Quantitate Anime*, et non invidibunt." The Latin text is cited from the edition by Cecchini, 28.

54. The linguistic root *admir-* recurs in *Benjamin maior* 112 times.

55. Hugus San Victoris, *Homiliae in Ecclesiam* (PL 175.11A): "Perspicax et liber animi contuitus in res perspicendas usquequaque diffuses."

56. *Benjamin maior* 1.4 (Aris [9] and PL 196.67D): "Contemplatio est libera mentis perspicacia in sapientiae spectacula cum admiratione suspensa."

57. *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, ed. Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

58. *Benjamin maior* 1.4 (Aris [9] and PL 196.67D).

59. *Ibid.* 1.4 (Aris [10] and PL 196.68B–C): "Proprium itaque est contemplationi iucunditatis suae spectaculo cum admiratione inhaerere."

60. *Ibid.* 4.12 (Aris [101] and PL 196.149A): "assuescimus in contemplationem adducere, et in eorum admiratione animum nostrum suspendere."

61. *Ibid.* 1.6 (Aris [12] and PL 196.69D).

62. Zinn, *Richard of St. Victor*, 24.

63. Dumeige, *Richard de Saint-Victor*, 141.

64. *Benjamin maior* 2.26 (Aris [53] and PL 196.107C): "secundum qualitatem et quantitatem nostrae admirationis."

65. *Ibid.*: "quanto amplius *admirando* delectaris et *delectando* admiraris, tanto libentius immoraris, tanto diligentius *perscrutaris*, profundiusque *illuminaris*."

66. Poirel—Sicard, "Figure vittorine," 477.

67. For the semantic value of "consideratio" in the Middle Ages and in the lyric poetry of the Troubadours, see Mira Mocan, *I pensieri del cuore: Per la semantica del provenzale cossirar* (Rome: Il Bagatto, 2004).

68. *Benjamin maior* 2.1 (Aris [22] and PL 196.79A–B): "Primum itaque contemplationis genus est in consideratione et *admiratione* rerum corporalium in omnibus eis quae per quinque sensus corporeos ingrediuntur ad animum. . . . Ad hoc enim debent adhuc rudes incipere, ut possint *paulatim ad altiora* quasi quibusdam profectionum gradibus *ascendere*. Ad hoc itaque contemplationis genus pertinet omnis *admiratio* Creatoris quae surgit ex consideratione rerum corporalium." For the translation of *Benjamin maior* into English I quote from Zinn, *Richard of St. Victor: The Mystical Ark*, 151–370.

69. As Mira Mocan has recently highlighted, extending Edmund Gardner's observations from 1913, the movements of the crows ("pole") which appear in Canto 21 of *Paradiso* can be likened to some kinds of flight found in *Benjamin maior*. See Edmund Gardner, *Dante and the Mystics. A Study of the Mystical Aspect of the Divina Commedia and its Relations With Some of Its Mediaeval Sources* (2<sup>d</sup> ed. New York: Haskell House, 1968): 173–174, and Mira Mocan, "'In avibus intellige spiritualia.' Sulle fonti di *Paradiso*, XXI, 34–42," *Percepta rependere dona: Studi di filologia per Anna Maria Luiselli Fadda*, ed. Corrado Bologna, Mira Mocan and Paolo Vaciago (Florence: Olschki, 2010): 189–206, esp. 202.

70. See Lino Pertile, "Le penne e il volo," in *La punta del disio: Semantica del desiderio nella "Commedia"* (Fiesole: Cadmo, 2005): 115–35; and Daniela Boccassini, *Il volo della mente Falconeria e Sofia nel mondo mediterraneo: Islam, Federico II, Dante* (Ravenna: Longo, 2003), with previous bibliography.



71. *Benjamin maior* 1.3 (Aris [8] and PL 196.66D): “Contemplatio libero volatu quocunque eam fert impetus mira agilitate circumfertur. Cogitatio serpit, meditatio incedit et ut multum currit. Contemplatio autem omnia circumvolat, et cum voluerit se in summis librat.”

72. Ibid. 1.5 (Aris [11] and PL 196.69A): “Videre licet alia quomodo tremulis alis saepeque reverberatis se in uno eodemque loco diutius suspendunt, et mobili se agitatione quasi immobiliter figunt, et ab eodem suspensionis suae loco diu multumque haerentia penitus non recedunt.”

73. Ibid. 5.9 (Aris [134] and PL 196.178C): “Sic utique sic humana intelligentia divino lumine irradiata, dum in intellectibilibium contemplatione suspenditur, dum in eorum admiratione distenditur, quanto semper ad altiora vel mirabiliora ducitur, tanto amplius, tanto copiosius dilatatur, et unde ab infimis remotior, inde in semetipsa purior et ad sublimia sublimior invenitur.”

74. Ibid. 5.2.

75. Ibid. 1.4 (Aris [10] and PL 196.68B–C).

76. Ibid. 5.5 (Aris [129] and PL 196.174): “Magnitudine admirationis anima humana supra semetipsam ducitur, quando divino lumine irradiata, et in summae pulchritudinis admiratione suspensa, tam vehementi stupore concutitur, ut a suo statu funditus excutiat, et in modum fulguris coruscantis, quanto profundius per despectam sui invisae pulchritudinis respectu, in ima deicitur, tanto sublimius, tanto celerius per summorum desiderium reverberata, et super semetipsam raptam, in sublimia elevatur.”

77. Ibid. 5.9 (Aris [133–34] and PL 196.178C–D): “Mens itaque velut aurora consurgit, quae ex visionis admiratione paulatim ad incrementa cognitionis proficit. Aurora siquidem paulatim elevatur, elevando dilatatur, dilatando clarificatur, sed miro modo dum tandem in diem desinit, per promotionis suae incrementa, ad defectum venit et unde accipit ut maior sit, inde ei accedit, tandemque accidit ut omnino non sit. Sic utique sic humana intelligentia divino lumine irradiata, dum in intellectibilibium contemplatione suspenditur, dum in eorum admiratione distenditur, quanto semper ad altiora vel mirabiliora ducitur, tanto amplius, tanto copiosius dilatatur, et unde ab infimis remotior, inde in semetipsa purior et ad sublimia sublimior invenitur. Sed in eiusmodi sublevatione, dum mens humana semper ad altiora crescit, dum diu crescendo tandem aliquando humanae capacitatis metas transcendit, fit demum ut a semetipsa penitus deficiat, et in supermundanum quemdam transformata affectum, tota supra semetipsam eat.”

78. See Richardi De Sancto Victore *De IV gradibus violentae caritatis*, in *Trattati d’amore cristiani del XII secolo*, ed. by Francesco Zambon (Milan: Fondazione Valla, 2007): 2:520–21.

79. *Benjamin maior* 5.5 (Aris [129] and PL 196.174C): “aestuantisque desiderii anxietas, in eiusmodi te raperet excessus . . . cordis tui desiderium inebriaret, qua te ipsum supra temetipsum raperet, et per mentis excessum in superna elevarer.”

80. Ibid. 5.9 (Aris [133] and PL 196.178B).

81. See Marco Ariani, “Mistica degli affetti e intelletto d’amore. Per una ridefinizione del canto XXIV del *Paradiso*,” *Rivista di Studi Danteschi* 9 (2009): 29–56.

82. *Benjamin maior* 5.9 (Aris [133–134] and PL 196.178C).

83. Ibid.

84. Ibid. 5.11 (Aris [135–136] and PL 196.180B).

85. *Par.* 19.40–45, and *Par.* 33.133–36. See François Boespflug, “Le créateur au compas *deus geometra* dans l’art d’Occident (IX<sup>e</sup>–XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle),” *Micrologus: Natura, scienze e società medievali* (= *La misura / Measurement*) 19 (2011): 113–30; and Friedrich Ohly, “*Deus geometra* Appunti per la storia di una rappresentazione di Dio,” *Geometria e memoria: Lettera e allegoria nel Medioevo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1985): 189–247.

86. See Philip Fisher, *Wonder, the Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

## L'incontro edenico con Beatrice e *Io sento sì d'Amor la gran possanza*

JAMES F. MCMENAMIN

Nel canto 30 del *Purgatorio*, Beatrice appare nel paradiso terrestre davanti a Dante per la prima volta dopo dieci anni. Saremmo tentati di considerare questo momento una ripresa dell'amore del personaggio, dopo l'ultima testimonianza scritta su Beatrice nel capitolo finale della *Vita Nuova*. Forse nella *Commedia* il pellegrino vuol convincersi solo per un attimo che Beatrice sia ancora quella di prima e che il suo amore per lei sia rimasto immutato dopo dieci anni. Infatti, subito dopo la prima comparsa di Beatrice, il poeta descrive la sua condizione ricorrendo alle stesse parole della *Vita Nuova* (usando il sostantivo "spirito" e il verbo "tremare") e così l'autore costruisce un ponte fra quest'incontro e la sua poesia precedente:

E lo spirito mio, che già cotanto  
tempo era stato ch'a la sua presenza  
non era di stupor, tremando, affranto,  
    sanza de li occhi aver più conoscenza,  
per occulta virtù che da lei mosse,  
d'antico amor senti la gran potenza.

(*Purg.* 30.34–39)

Il ponte, però, è poco stabile perché in questi versi il legame con la *Vita Nuova* è messo in dubbio da un altro riferimento ricco di significato. Quello che sorprende qui non sono i richiami al *libello*, ma il fatto che queste due terzine siano rette da un ultimo verso che rinvia alla canzone *Io sento sì d'Amor la gran possanza*, scritta non per Beatrice, ma per un'altra donna, una delle giovani per cui Dante scrisse in altre rime.<sup>1</sup>

d'antico amor senti la gran potenza  
(*Purg.* 30.39)

Io sento sì d'Amor la gran possanza  
(*Io sento sì*, v. 1)

Il legame fra i due testi si esplicita attraverso la ripresa delle medesime parole (“amor”-“sentire”-“la gran potenza/possanza”) e, in più, indica un cambiamento attraverso il mutamento di tempo (da “sento” a “senti”) e di aggettivazione (dall’“amor” all’“antico amor”). È chiaro che nel *Purgatorio*, in quel momento, l’“antico amor” si riferisce all’amore del protagonista per Beatrice immortalato nella *Vita Nuova*. Ma allora—dobbiamo chiederci—perché, alla discesa di Beatrice, il poeta ricorre al primo verso di una canzone che documenta la trasgressione lussuriosa per cui il protagonista viene successivamente criticato da Beatrice stessa? Questo tipo di intertestualità stupisce nel contesto della *Commedia* e fa pensare a una motivazione profonda di tipo metaletterario.

Il rimprovero di Beatrice nel canto successivo (canto 31) suggerisce un legame più concreto:

Non ti dovea gravar le penne in giuso,  
ad aspettar più colpo, o pargoletta  
o altra novità con sì breve uso.  
(*Purg.* 31.58–60)

Pur tenendo presente questo riferimento, sappiamo quanto è difficile dimostrare che la “pargoletta” menzionata qui da Beatrice sia la stessa della nostra canzone, anche per la difficoltà interpretativa della canzone stessa.<sup>2</sup> Contini avverte che la scelta della parola è dovuta probabilmente a “una semplice preferenza lessicale,” perché la donna Pietra anch’essa chiamata “pargoletta” nella canzone *Io son venuto al punto de la rota* (v. 72) e l’“angioletta” della canzone *I’ mi son pargoletta bella e nova* (v. 19) sono difficilmente riconducibili alla stessa persona.<sup>3</sup> La caratteristica che lega tutte queste donne è la loro giovinezza. Quindi, anche se non si legge esplicitamente *pargoletta* nella canzone, la giovane è pur sempre un’estranea e il rimando a un testo dedicato a una relazione fuori del rapporto con Beatrice dovrebbe far riflettere.

In quanto alla *Commedia*, l’incontro con Beatrice nei canti 30 e 31 del *Purgatorio* ci rivela come l’amore di Dante per Beatrice e il suo traviamiento siano legati. Nel canto 30, leggiamo della discesa di Beatrice, la

scomparsa di Virgilio, e poi le prime accuse di Beatrice a Dante—rivolte, però, agli angeli—in cui Beatrice ripercorre la gioventù del poeta, sottolineando il suo primo errore di ‘essersi dato’ ad un’altra donna (“questi si tolse a me, e diessi altrui,” v. 126). Nel canto 31, Beatrice rivolge le sue accuse direttamente a Dante. Dopo una prima conferma del pellegrino (vv. 13–15), Beatrice gli chiede perché doveva così perdere la speranza (“per che del passare innanzi / dovessiti così spogliar la spene?,” vv. 26–27) e invaghirsi delle “agevolezze” e “avanzi” mostrati sul volto degli altri (vv. 28–30). Inserita fra una serie di accuse, rimproveri e domande è la breve confessione di Dante: “Le presenti cose / col falso lor piacer volser miei passi, / tosto che ‘l vostro viso si nascose” (*Purg.* 31.34–36). In un secondo momento abbiamo il pentimento (vv. 85–93) e poi il rito della penitenza, ossia l’immersione nel fiume Letè (vv. 94–96), il passaggio alla riva beata (vv. 103–5) e la rimozione del velo che nasconde il viso di Beatrice (vv. 133–38).

In *Io sento sì*, più che in ogni altro componimento delle *Rime*, si analizzano e si pongono in rilievo gli effetti della grande potenza di Amore.<sup>4</sup> Il poeta esamina i sentimenti e i pensieri proprio in mezzo alle emozioni scaturite dall’atto dell’innamoramento e raramente esce da questo spazio chiuso se non per il tema ricorrente nella canzone del servizio amoroso che domina e dà una più chiara struttura al contenuto per mezzo delle reiterazioni.<sup>5</sup> Basta vedere come il poeta rende manifesto questo servizio attraverso i vari usi lessicali: “servir(e),” “servigio,” “servidor” e “servente.”<sup>6</sup> Il servizio diventa l’unica *mercede* sicura da parte di una donna indifferente.

L’importanza del servizio amoroso va ridimensionata nel contesto della canzone. Infatti, la sua funzione si nota in quasi tutte le stanze del componimento: nella prima stanza, il poeta spiega l’effetto del suo amore che lo rende debole riconoscendo la grandezza del suo “volere,” ma la finitezza del “potere”; nella seconda stanza, spiega il processo dell’innamoramento fino ad arrivare alla nozione del suo servizio; nella terza, riconosce i due sentimenti contrari di voler morire se il servizio lo richiedesse, ma se la giovinezza della donna impedisce la consegna del dono, il poeta “spera tempo” o *attende* (e quindi vorrebbe vivere) per continuare il proprio servizio; nella quarta stanza, ammette di avere già il dono, giacché trae dei benefici dal suo servizio; l’ultima stanza parla della dignità di essere innamorato di una donna indifferente e degli effetti della presenza e assenza della donna.

Non interessa, in questa sede, identificare la “pargoletta” cui accenna Beatrice con la giovane donna di *Io sento sì*. La canzone, però, si presta ad essere interpretata come un documento del tradimento, un cattivo modello del servizio amoroso che era ben presente quando il poeta metteva in versi l’incontro edenico e quando rifletteva sul proprio errore. Il riferimento alla canzone sembra evidente perché è impossibile che il poeta abbia inconsapevolmente intessuto una simile ripresa in un momento così importante.

Ma c’è di più. L’incontro con Beatrice sembra chiamare in causa vari elementi della canzone, diminuendo la forza del componimento e rovesciandone il senso. Beatrice nella *Commedia* contrappone la giovinezza della donna (*Purg.* 31.58–60) all’età matura di Dante criticando in questo modo l’immaturità intellettuale del pellegrino e l’insensatezza delle sue azioni (vv. 61–63). In *Io sento sì* Dante parla esplicitamente di una donna giovane, la cui indifferenza viene rivalutata in modo positivo per riflettere poi la dignità della forza amorosa. Il poeta dichiara che è possibile servire una donna anche se il proprio amore non viene ricambiato: “Io son servente, e quando penso a cui, / qual ch’ella sia, di tutto son contento, / *ché l’uom può ben servir contra talento*” (*Io sento sì*, vv. 43–45) e poi “Altro ch’Amor non mi potea far tale / ch’i’ fosse *degnamente* / *cosa di quella che non s’innamora*, / ma stassi come donna a cui non cale / dell’amorosa mente / che senza lei non può passare un’ora” (*Io sento sì*, vv. 65–70). Qui l’indifferenza della giovane si distingue dalla volontà patente di Beatrice di portare il protagonista in “dritta parte”:

Alcun tempo il sostenni col mio volto:  
mostrando li occhi giovanetti a lui,  
meco il menava in dritta parte vòlto.  
(*Purg.* 30.121–23)

La morte di Beatrice avrebbe dovuto farlo riflettere sulla precarietà della vita e sulla necessità di prendere la via che conduce a Dio, ma secondo Beatrice, Dante fece altrimenti:

Sì tosto come in su la soglia fui  
di mia seconda etade e mutai vita,  
questi si tolse a me, e diessi altrui.  
Quando di carne a spirto era salita,  
e bellezza e virtù cresciuta m’era,  
fu’ io a lui men cara e men gradita;  
(*Purg.* 30.124–29)

Beatrice gli chiede nel canto successivo:

e se 'l sommo piacere sì ti fallio  
per la mia morte, qual cosa mortale  
dovea poi trarre te nel suo disio?  
(*Purg.* 31.52–54)

Nella canzone, i desideri del poeta rispecchiano la critica principale di Beatrice verso la pargoletta o qualsiasi novità di “sì breve uso” (*Purg.* 31.60) perché ben due volte Dante esprime il suo desiderio di avere tempo, cioè di rimanere in vita per continuare il suo servizio: “e se di buon voler nasce mercede, / io la dimando *per aver più vita* / dagli occhi che nel lor bello splendore / portan conforto ovunque io sento amore” (*Io sento sì*, vv. 14–16) e poi “e se merzé giovanezza mi toglie, / *i' spero tempo* che più ragion prenda, / pur che la vita tanto si difenda” (*Io sento sì*, vv. 46–48). Queste richieste di tempo non possono che sembrare vuote e insensate nell’ottica cristiana di Beatrice.

Anche l’evento fondamentale della morte viene evocato in senso figurato per definire e potenziare la forza dell’amore incondizionato provato per la donna: (“per che l’adoperar sì forte bramo / che s’io ’l credessi far fuggendo lei, / lieve saria, ma so ch’io ne morrei,” *Io sento sì*, vv. 30–32). In seguito, Dante esprime il suo amore in modo sublime con un rovesciamento significativo in cui la morte nel contesto di questo servizio equivale al piacere: “*Ben è verace amor* quel che m’ha preso / e ben mi stringe forte, / quand’io farei quel ch’io dico per lui; / ché nullo amore è di cotanto peso / quanto quel che *la morte* / *face piacer* per ben servire altrui” (*Io sento sì*, vv. 33–38). In questi versi, come mette in evidenza Barolini, si nota il linguaggio di Francesca che si oppone chiaramente all’“amore vero” di Beatrice.<sup>7</sup> Infatti, nella *Commedia*, Beatrice critica aspramente la validità del suo “verace amor”:

e volse i passi suoi *per via non vera*,  
*imagini di ben seguendo false*,  
che nulla promession rendono intera.  
(*Purg.* 30.130–32)

Rilevante è l’uso nella canzone della forma troncata dell’avverbio “bene,” adoperato quattro volte nella stanza centrale.<sup>8</sup>

<i>Ben</i> è verace amor quel che m'ha preso	v. 33
è <i>ben</i> mi stringe forte	v. 34
face piacer per <i>ben</i> servire altrui	v. 38
ché l'uomo può <i>ben</i> servir contra talento	v. 45

Dante scrive addirittura che l'amore che sente per questa donna lo spinge "a ben far" (v. 51), la stessa espressione adoperata poi nella descrizione di Beatrice nei primi momenti del suo arrivo:

Quasi ammiraglio che in poppa e in prora  
viene a veder la gente che ministra  
per li altri legni, e a *ben far* l'incora;  
(*Purg.* 30.58–60)

Per Beatrice, le false immagini del bene segnano l'inizio della fine del poeta: "Tanto giù cadde, che tutti argomenti / a la salute sua eran già corti, / fuor che mostrarli le perdute genti" (*Purg.* 30.136–138). Dante conferma quello che dice Beatrice con un "sì" e poi si confessa piangendo: "Le presenti cose / col *falso lor piacer* volser miei passi, / tosto che 'l vostro viso si nascose" (*Purg.* 31.34–36). Nella canzone, il poeta sottolinea questo piacere, sempre nella stanza centrale, quando scrive che il suo gran desiderio è nato dal piacere che viene accolto nel *bel viso di ogni bel*: "per virtù del *piacimento* / che nel *bel viso d'ogni bel s'accoglie*" (*Io sento sì*, vv. 41–42). Sarà questo un esempio delle false immagini di "ben" evidenziate proprio da Beatrice? Il desiderio di quell'amore, ormai ritenuto falso da Beatrice, è quello che lo portava "a ben far" nella canzone, cioè ad agire bene in termini morali:

Quand'io penso un gentil disio ch'è nato  
del gran disio ch'i' porto,  
ch'a ben far tira tutto il mio podere . . .  
(*Io sento sì*, vv. 49–51)

Le parole di Beatrice sembrano rispondere al gran desiderio sentito dal poeta nella canzone perché nella *Commedia* l'amata riafferma il suo ruolo di riportare il pellegrino sulla dritta via, spingendolo ad amare il bene: "Per entro i mie' disiri, / che ti menavano ad amar lo bene / di là dal qual non è a che s'aspiri" (*Purg.* 31.22–24). Nella canzone, il "ben far" sembra semplicemente una conseguenza dell'amore del poeta per la donna, mentre per Beatrice, amare il bene si presenta come l'obiettivo principale.

Riassumendo, osserviamo in questo confronto come Beatrice condanna il desiderio provocato dalle false immagini di bene, lo stesso tipo di desiderio ingannevole che si potrebbe applicare all'amante condannata nel secondo cerchio dell'*Inferno*. Ritroviamo, perciò, il linguaggio suggestivamente lussuoso di Francesca in *Io sento sì*. Infatti, la canzone, se letta in rapporto alla *Commedia*, perde la sua forza, specialmente se confrontata con i rimproveri di Beatrice e se vista dalla posizione di lei come intermediaria tra il poeta e Dio—una collocazione mai attribuita alla giovinetta della canzone. La prospettiva metafisica è inesistente in *Io sento sì*, mentre ad esempio nelle canzoni *I' mi son pargoletta bella e nova* e *Amor, che movi la tua virtù dal cielo* la provenienza oltremondana dell'Amore è esplicita.<sup>9</sup> Il nostro testo mantiene sempre un registro mondano con il poeta che si concentra in modo isolato e quasi microscopico sul rapporto interiore con questa giovane: l'autore non si allontana mai dai suoi sentimenti e dai pensieri per lei. La forza dell'Amore viene esposta nel tempo presente—l'atto stesso dell'innamoramento in tutto il suo dramma viene catturato nei versi, diventando così simbolo e modello dell'errore. In quel momento, Dante provava Amore, ma solo dopo capisce di aver lasciato la diritta via. Qui, Dante esamina *in medias res* il sentimento della potenza dell'Amore, la stessa potenza che *prese* le due anime peccaminose del quinto canto dell'*Inferno* e proprio per questo motivo, si potrebbe leggere la canzone come contraltare dell'amore che Dante provava per Beatrice.

Tornando alla *Commedia*, Dante nell'episodio della sua confessione parla poco e ascolta tanto. La sua diventa piuttosto una conferma anziché una confessione tradizionale: fra tutte le accuse, una sola terzina vale come confessione.<sup>10</sup> L'intensità dell'incontro è dovuta al fatto che il pellegrino deve ascoltare l'elenco dei mali commessi proprio dalla persona ferita: una situazione spiacevole e contraria a qualsiasi idealizzazione del fatidico incontro con l'amata. Beatrice è l'oggetto dell'innamoramento di Dante e anche la vittima del suo tradimento. E tutto questo la distingue dall'immagine vincente trasmessaci alla fine della *Vita Nuova*. Le accuse di Beatrice non sono rivelazioni per il pellegrino, e nemmeno un interrogatorio giudiziario, bensì una presentazione formale dei mali da lui commessi. Se fosse stata una vera accusa, ci sarebbe stata poi una difesa. Se si fosse trattato di una vera confessione, Dante sarebbe stato l'unico a rivelare i propri peccati. Beatrice funziona come riflesso della coscienza di Dante.<sup>11</sup> D'altra parte, il protagonista non rimane mai stupito dalle rivelazioni, non



mostra mai incredulità—solo rammarico per le proprie trasgressioni enunciate dalla persona offesa e amata. Per lui, non ci sono sorprese. Trema (v. 36), ha paura (v. 45), piange (v. 54), si vergogna (v. 78), ma mai nega, mai dà una giustificazione delle sue azioni. La paura che lo fa tremare all'arrivo di Beatrice non è affatto uguale a quella della *Vita Nuova*, perché in quel momento nel paradiso terrestre sa di dover affrontare la sua amata nelle vesti di un traditore. Il pellegrino nel momento della discesa di Beatrice non segnala immediatamente la sua “decenne sete,” cioè il suo profondo desiderio di rivederla che dura da ben dieci anni. Questa “sete” al momento della comparsa di Beatrice è ostacolata dal suo passato, dal suo traviamiento. Quindi, dobbiamo leggere il personaggio di questi versi come se fosse già cosciente del proprio errore, intensificato dal fatto che ha già attraversato tutto l'inferno e patito tutte le pene della salita del purgatorio: ciò però non toglie niente alla forza dell'incontro—anzi, la consapevolezza del pellegrino potrebbe rendere drammaticamente più intensa la loro riunione.

Dunque, il verso “d'antico amor sentì la gran potenza” consente una lettura su due livelli, sovrapposti uno all'altro in un rapporto di reciproca dipendenza: il primo livello è quello letterale in cui il personaggio percepisce l'arrivo di Beatrice (l'“antico amor”) attraverso gli effetti dell'amore stesso (l'“occulta virtù”), di quel vecchio amore della *Vita Nuova*. Al secondo livello, il poeta, riprendendo le parole del primo verso di *Io sento sì*, e contaminando i versi della *Commedia* con le parole stesse che documentano il proprio peccato, crea nel personaggio un precoce riconoscimento di colpevolezza e la paura di dover affrontare la sua Beatrice proprio perché in quelle parole echeggia il tradimento. La poesia contaminata riflette anche la contaminazione del suo amore per lei. Solo la *confessione* può ripristinare questo amore. E solo il pentimento può liberarlo completamente dal peccato.

La lettura dei versi finali della *Commedia* ci permette di seguire tutto il percorso del pellegrino e anche di essere partecipi al perfezionamento del rapporto fra Dante e Beatrice. Non per nulla il poeta esalta il ruolo che Beatrice ha avuto nella sua liberazione: “Tu m'hai di servo tratto a libertate / per tutte quelle vie, per tutt' i modi / che di ciò fare avei la potestate” (*Par.* 31.85–87). Dal primo incontro nel paradiso terrestre, che mette in discussione e indebolisce una canzone fondata sul servizio amoroso, il poeta chiude il rapporto con Beatrice con un ultimo richiamo alla sua servitù passata, evidenziando in modo definitivo l'inutilità di quel

servizio, e così facendo, diminuisce sempre di più il testo del tradimento nella prospettiva spirituale e oltremondana del *Paradiso*.

*Dickinson College*  
*Carlisle, Pennsylvania*

## NOTE

Per tutte le citazioni della *Commedia* faccio riferimento all'edizione curata da Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi (Milano: A. Mondadori, 1991) e per le citazioni delle *Rime* adopero l'edizione curata da Domenico De Robertis, *Le Rime di Dante* (Firenze: Casa Editrice Le Lettere, 2002).

1. L'Ottimo, Poletto, Torraca, Mattalia, Hollander e Fosca sembrano gli unici commentatori a richiamare l'attenzione su questi versi, ma nessuno sembra cogliere la singolarità di tale legame e soprattutto la particolarità di incontrare *questo* verso in *questo* luogo del *Purgatorio*. Hollander lascia comunque un punto interrogativo: "Two other poems seem to be dedicated to yet another woman, one who may be distinct from any of the those already mentioned: "Amor che movi" ("Love, who send down [your power from heaven]"—XC) and "Io sento sì d'Amor la gran possanza" ("So much do I feel Love's mighty power"—XCI). The latter is cited indirectly at *Purgatorio* 30.39, when Dante sees Beatrice on the chariot: 'd'antico amor senti la gran potenza.' Is this self-citation used as self-criticism?," in Robert Hollander, *Dante. A Life in Works* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 42.

2. Non solo mancano le prove, ma anche l'esistenza di una tradizione d'interpretazione allegorica della canzone complica l'identificazione. Vincenzo Pernicone riassume questa linea: "La tradizione dell'interpretazione allegorica di *Io sento sì d'Amor* e di *Amor che movi*, che fu del Witte, del Fraticelli, del Giuliani, dello Zingarelli e di altri, è stata ripresa, dopo l'edizione del Barbi, dal Mattalia, dal Nardi e, più recentemente, dal Foster e dal Boyde, i quali le considerano composte per la Donna gentile-Filosofia, e anteriormente alle due canzoni dottrinali. Il Contini non nasconde le sue incertezze: potrebbero appartenere al gruppo delle rime per la *pargoletta*, ma gli pare che, specialmente nella canzone *Io sento sì d'Amor* «si celi un sopra senso, forse allusione all'amore della sapienza» in *Enciclopedia dantesca*, 3, ed. Umberto Bosco (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana), 504. Per uno studio completo più recente, si veda Zygmunt G. Barański, "*Io sento sì d'Amor la gran possanza*," in Dante Alighieri, *Le quindici canzoni. Lettere da diversi I*, 1–7 (Lecce: Pensa MultiMedia Editore, 2009), 145–211.

3. Dante Alighieri, *Rime*, ed. Gianfranco Contini (Torino: Einaudi, 1995), 113.

4. Cfr. Barański, "*Io sento sì d'Amor la gran possanza*," 154–55.

5. Sono in molti a criticare la canzone, soprattutto per la sua compattezza concettuale. Contini insiste sulla densità: "È una canzone lenta, riflessiva, faticosa (a stento si liberano qua e là alcuni versi, cui del resto giova l'isolamento, così: *Io non la vidi tante volte ancora Ch'io non trovasse in lei nova bellezza*), sugli effetti che nel poeta produce l'amore d'una bellissima donna" in *Rime*, 126). Foster e Boyde sottolineano la mancanza di liricità: "In tone it is again weighty, unlyrical—even anti-lyrical—worthy of *rigidum scolarium vel magistrorum* (cf. *DVE* II.vi.5)," in *Dante's Lyric Poetry*, vol. 2. *Commentary*, eds. K. Foster and P. Boyde (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 200. Mario Pazzaglia, pur ribadendo la lentezza della canzone, rivaluta la sua importanza: "un andamento riflessivo, lento, più gravemente patetico, e meno originale stilisticamente e ideologicamente; interessante, tuttavia, in quanto riprende, in una sorta di *summa*, i modi e le forme della tradizione" in "Due canzoni dantesche: *Amor, che movi tua virtù da cielo* e *Io sento sì d'Amor la gran possanza*," *Lecture Classensi* 26 (1997), 27.

6. "Che sol per lei *servir* mi tegno caro. / E' miei pensier', che pur d'amor si fanno, / come a lor segno al suo *servigio* vanno; / per che l'adoperar sì forte bramo" (*Io sento sì*, vv. 27–30); "quanto quel che la morte / face piacer per ben *servire* altrui" (*Io sento sì*, vv. 37–38); "Io son *servente*, e quando

penso a cui, / qual ch'ella sia, di tutto son contento, / ché l'uom può ben *servir* contra talento" (*Io sento sì*, vv. 43–45); "mi par di *servidor* nome tenere: / così dinanzi agli occhi del parere / si fa 'l *servir* merzé d'altrui bontate. / Ma poi ch'i' mi restringo a veritate / convien che tal disio *servigio* conti" (*Io sento sì*, vv. 54–58).

7. "The language used in *Doglia mi reca* for being possessed by desire—"I' son presa"—is the language of the lyric tradition: we remember, for instance, Giacomo's 'como l'amor m'ha priso,' Guido delle Colonne's 'si m'ave preso e tolto,' and Dante's 'Ben è verace amor quel che m'ha preso / e ben mi stringe forte' from the canzone *Io sento sì d'Amor la gran possanza* (33–34). It is Francesca's language: 'Amor, ch'al cor gentil ratto s'apprende, / *prese* costui' (100–101), 'Amor, ch'a nullo amato amar perdona, / mi *prese*' (103–4)," in Teodolinda Barolini, "Dante and Cavalcanti (On Making Distinctions in Matters of Love): *Inferno* V in Its Lyric Context," *Dante Studies* 116 (1998), 50.

8. Cfr. Francesco Biondillo, *Le rime amorose di Dante* (Messina: Casa Editrice G. D'Anna, 1960), 120–134.

9. "Le prime cinque stanze si concentrano principalmente sull'amante, come è reso subito evidente dal fatto che *Io sento sì* è «la canzone che sciorina il numero più alto di occorrenze di 'io,' 28 contro i 14 della canz. 1, più 21 pronomi e 38 verbi di 1a persona, nei soli primi 80 versi» (De Robertis, 91). Inoltre, strano in un testo erotico medievale, il tono è seccamente descrittivo: si potrebbe definirlo analitico, persino oggettivo. [ . . . ] Lo scopo di Dante è stendere una *descriptio personae*: non tanto centrata su elementi esterni, ma focalizzata sul comportamento dell'io, sul suo stato spirituale, psicologico e intellettuale" in Barański, "*Io sento sì d'Amor la gran possanza*," 173.

10. "Confusione e paura insieme miste / mi pinsero un tal "sì" fuor de la bocca, / al quale intender fuor mestier le viste" (*Purg.* 31.13–15).

11. Si veda Lino Pertile, *La puttana e il gigante. Dal Cantico dei cantici al Paradiso terrestre di Dante* (Ravenna: Longo, 1998), 24.

# Dido, Aeneas, and the Evolution of Dante's Poetics

TRISTAN KAY

**T**he allusion to Virgil's Dido in Canto 30 of the *Purgatorio* ("con-  
osco i segni de l'antica fiamma" [*Purg.* 30.48]) is the most celebrated of a number of intriguing references to this classical figure in Dante's works. These passages not only elucidate the poet's complex attitude toward ancient literature but also map his own evolving meditation on desire, poetry, and selfhood.<sup>1</sup> Dido's fateful romance with Aeneas, recounted in Book 4 of the *Aeneid*, serves as a vital touchstone for Dante, a lens through which he examines the transformations in his own amatory experience. The present article will trace the Florentine's engagement with *Aeneid* 4 in two of his earlier works, the philosophical treatise *Convivio* and the erotic canzone "Così nel mio parlar vogli'esser aspro," with a view to shedding light upon the poetic and self-reflexive implications of his allusion to Dido in *Purgatory*.

## "L'antica fiamma": Dido in the Earthly Paradise

Dante's reference to Dido's "ancient flame" appears in a cluster of citations that frame Beatrice's descent into the Earthly Paradise and reunion with Dante-pilgrim. It constitutes perhaps the most overtly intertextual sequence of the *Commedia*, one that offers important insights into Dante's poetics and his handling of scriptural as well as classical sources. The advent of Beatrice is first announced through a direct Latin citation of the *Song of Songs*, voiced by one of the twenty-four elders who precede her:

e un di loro, quasi da ciel messo,  
'Veni, sponsa, de Libano' cantando  
gridò tre volte, e tutti li altri appresso.  
(*Purg.* 30.10–12)

The identification of the veiled Beatrice with the Song's *sponsa* is further implied by the likening of her arrival to the sun rising at dawn in the eastern sky ("Io vidi già nel cominciar del giorno / la parte oriental tutta rosata, / e l'altro ciel di bel sereno addorno; / e la faccia del sol nascere ombrata" [*Purg.* 30.22–25]), which recalls an analogous simile in the biblical text: "Who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army set in array?" (Song of Songs 6:9).<sup>2</sup> The Song's medieval commentators interpreted the figure of the bride as the Virgin Mary, Divine Wisdom, the church, or the Christian soul. Whichever identity or identities Beatrice is meant to assume here, the citation of the Hebrew text underlines the fact that this reunion of earthly lovers also attests to a bond of profound spiritual significance.<sup>3</sup> Two further allusions quickly follow: the first adapted from the Vulgate, the second lifted directly from Virgil's *Aeneid*:

Tutti dicean: 'Benedictus qui venis!',  
e fior gittando e di sopra e dintorno,  
'Manibus, oh, date lilia plenis!'.  
(*Purg.* 30.19–21)

The first Latin phrase derives from Mark's account (11:9–10) of Jesus's entrance into Jerusalem and renders explicit Beatrice's Christological function in the poem, not least since Dante preserves the masculine gender of *benedictus*. The Virgilian citation, meanwhile, had originally referred to Marcellus, heir to the Roman Empire, who had appeared at the end of Anchises' prophetic lament for fallen Romans in *Aeneid* 6. Marcellus appears an apt figure of comparison insofar as he, like Beatrice, was a character of uncommon virtue who had likewise died prematurely. As critics have noted, however, the correspondence between Beatrice and Marcellus is ultimately contrastive rather than analogous. Whereas Marcellus's lilies were funereal, the white lilies of *Purgatorio* 30 connote the resurrection. The citation thus articulates the opposition between Virgilian "tragedy" and Dantean "comedy," a theme that permeates the poem but receives its fullest expression here in the Earthly Paradise.<sup>4</sup>

Virgil's sudden disappearance from the narrative is itself framed by two further allusions to the Mantuan poet's own work:

Tosto che ne la vista mi percosse  
l'alta virtù che già m'avea trafitto  
prima ch'io fuor di puerizia fosse,  
volsimi a la sinistra col respitto  
col quale il fantolin corre a la mamma  
quando ha paura o quando elli è affitto,  
per dicere a Virgilio: "Men che dramma  
di sangue m'è rimaso che non tremi:  
conosco i segni de l'antica fiamma."  
Ma Virgilio n'avea lasciati scemi  
di sé, Virgilio dolcissimo patre,  
Virgilio a cui per mia salute die'mi.  
(*Purg.* 30.40–51)

The threefold repetition of Virgil's name in lines 49–51 is widely seen as an allusion to the words voiced by the severed head of Orpheus lamenting the loss of Eurydice, recounted in the fourth *Georgic*: "That voice, that stone-cold tongue, continued to cry out, 'Eurydice, O poor Eurydice,' as its life's blood drained out of it and the river banks repeated that 'Eurydice,' a dolorous refrain" (4.525–57).<sup>5</sup> Rachel Jacoff, for example, argues that this allusion presents Beatrice as a "successful" Eurydice—a beloved who, despite dying young, is recovered by the (anti-)Orphic pilgrim.<sup>6</sup>

The most surprising allusion comes, however, in line 48, as Dante-pilgrim turns to Virgil and iterates virtually verbatim the foreboding words expressed by Dido on realizing that she has fallen in love with Aeneas: "Conosco i segni dell'antica fiamma" ("Agnosco veteris vestigia flammae").<sup>7</sup> Dido's flame had formerly burned for her dead husband Sychaeus, to whose ashes she had sworn her fidelity, in words spoken to her sister Anna, who attempts to persuade Dido of the personal and political benefits of wedding Aeneas. Unbeknown to Dido, her fateful love derives from the goddess Venus, who has instructed her son Cupid to impersonate Aeneas's son Ascanius and go to Dido bearing gifts. This encounter with Cupid, in the guise of Ascanius, marks the moment when Dido's love for Aeneas is first roused. Their love, consummated during their retreat from a storm to the shelter of a cave, is short lived. Aeneas, decides to abandon Dido and set sail for Italy, having been reminded by Mercury of his providential duty of founding a new Troy in Italy—"a land

pregnant with empire and seething with war”—and establishing there a universal empire.<sup>8</sup> Mercury reprimands Aeneas for the folly of potentially squandering his political destiny for the sake of a capricious woman, arguing that “woman is forever an uncertain and inconstant thing.”<sup>9</sup> Despite Dido’s irate entreaties, Aeneas remains steadfastly committed to his divinely willed course of action, foregoing the personal gratification of love for the universal benefit of empire. In a particularly instructive simile, to which we shall return, Virgil describes Aeneas’s virile restraint by likening him to an oak, improbably standing firm in the face of “the potentially destructive winds of female garrulity”:<sup>10</sup>

As when, among the Alps, north winds will strain against each other to root out with blasts—now on this side, now that—a stout oak tree whose wood is full of years; the roar is shattering, the trunk is shaken, and high branches scatter on the ground; but it still grips the rocks; as steeply as it thrusts its crown into the upper air, so deep the roots it reaches down to Tartarus: no less than this, the hero; he is battered on this side and on that by assiduous words; he feels care in his mighty chest, and yet his mind cannot be moved; the tears fall, useless.<sup>11</sup>

Spurned by Aeneas and fearing the advances of Iarbas, king of Gaetulia, Dido ultimately contrives her own death, slaying herself with Aeneas’s sword atop a funeral pyre built of his remaining belongings. As suggested by Peter S. Hawkins, the incendiary metaphor of the “ancient flame” foreshadows this tragic fate, in its evocation not only of the pyre, but also the images of “ardent” desire that proliferate in *Aeneid* 4.<sup>12</sup>

The two lovers meet again in the Underworld, with Dido, now reunited with Sychaeus, dwelling in the Mourning Fields among those who killed themselves for love. Aeneas sheds tears upon beholding his former lover and tries to persuade her that it was the decree of the gods, and not his own volition, that led him to abandon her. Yet Dido, unmoved and stonelike, turns away. Following his crucial encounter with Anchises, in which the providential nature of his journey is elucidated, Aeneas leaves Hades and sets sail for Italy, where he is destined to wed the markedly depersonalized Lavinia, through whom Trojan and Italian lineage will be joined.<sup>13</sup>

The patriarchal categories underpinning Aeneas’s encounter with and departure from Dido are both fairly explicit and representative of the *Aeneid* as a whole: female/male; passion/self-mastery; affective bonds/depersonalized political destiny. It is ultimately the irreconcilability of

these spheres—or, as Winthrop Wetherbee puts it, “the remorseless subordination of human concerns . . . to the task of empire”—that lends Virgil’s poem its tragic tenor.<sup>14</sup> My aim here is to consider how these Virgilian value-spheres are directly negotiated by Dante at diverse points in his career, and how he first adheres to and later departs from this classical paradigm of desire and selfhood.

Superficially, Dante’s use of the “ancient flame” metaphor in Eden might be seen as fitting simply because the pilgrim’s love for Beatrice has been rekindled by the flame that lay extinguished during the period of his straying from her. Dante-pilgrim’s assumption of the role of Dido implicitly figures Beatrice as both Aeneas and Sychaeus,<sup>15</sup> while Virgil takes on the role of Anna, Dido’s sister and confidante.<sup>16</sup> At stake, as in Virgil’s story, are broken vows following the death of the beloved (Dido is in fact identified in *Inferno* 5.62 as “colei che . . . ruppe fede al cener di Sicheo”).<sup>17</sup> Looking deeper, however, it is easy to understand why the assumption of Dido’s identity on the part of the pilgrim has typically been seen as jarring. Unlike Dido’s “flame,” Dante’s now burns anew for its original object of desire, not for a rival love.<sup>18</sup> What is more, Dido’s very carnal love was emblematically destructive, whereas Dante’s of course proves redemptive. This contrast is all the more pronounced when we consider Dante’s representation of Dido elsewhere in the *Commedia*. Her status in the poem as the lustful soul *par excellence* is first revealed by the fact that the carnal sinners Paolo and Francesca belong to “la schiera ov’è Dido” (*Inf.* 5.85) and is later buttressed by Dante’s two references to her in the Heaven of Venus, home to the repentant lustful, which highlight her legendary concupiscence and faithlessness (*Par.* 8.1–9; *Par.* 9.97–99).<sup>19</sup> Important too is the Augustinian resonance of the episode. The idea that Dante’s reception of Dido derives substantially from Augustine is strongly suggested by the periphrasis “colei che s’ancise amorosa” (*Inf.* 5.61), which closely echoes Augustine’s words “quia se occidit ab amore” (who killed herself for love) in *Confessions* 1.13, as well as Virgil’s own phrase “hic quos durus amor crudeli tabe peredit” (whom bitter love consumed with brutal waste [*Aen.* 6.442]) in the Mourning Fields.<sup>20</sup> Reading the Dido citation through the prism of Augustine, as does Giuseppe Mazzotta, the disappearing Virgil can be seen to assume the role of Dido in the *Confessions*, over whose fate the young Augustine shed tears while neglecting his own spiritual well-being:



For to love this world is to break troth with you, yet men applaud and are ashamed to be otherwise. I did not weep over this, but instead I wept for Dido, who surrendered her life to the sword, while I forsook you and surrendered myself to the lowest of your created things. (1.13)<sup>21</sup>

As is evident, the pilgrim is rebuked by Beatrice (on account of his tears for the departing Virgil) in terms that call to mind this Augustinian precedent, including an allusion to Dido's fateful sword:

“Dante, perché Virgilio se ne vada,  
non pianger anco, non piangere ancora;  
ché pianger ti conven per altra spada.”  
(*Purg.* 30.55–57)

For manifold reasons, then, modern critics tend to agree that Dante's allusion to Dido in the Earthly Paradise highlights a contrast between “tragic” and “comic” conceptions of love.<sup>22</sup> Like the funereal lilies for Marcellus, the evocation of Dido's tragic passion prompts us to conceive of its converse, to consider the redemptive capacity of human passion unimaginable to Virgil or his protagonists. I am wholly sympathetic to this line of interpretation, especially as expounded in the excellent (and complementary) essays by Kevin Brownlee and Hawkins.<sup>23</sup> My aim here, however, is to consider Dante's momentary appropriation of Dido's identity in somewhat different terms: less in terms of Dante's relationship to Virgil (which dominates existing critical treatment of the topic) than in terms of the development of his own poetics. For I believe that another important dimension of his use of *Aeneid* 4 in the Earthly Paradise is revealed by considering it in conjunction with the poet's treatment of the Dido and Aeneas story in the *Convivio* and the *rime petrose*. In short, I propose that by tracing Dante's handling of—and, in particular, his identification with—the two Virgilian lovers in these three works we can map with greater insight the important oscillations in his reflection upon the relationship between vernacular poetry, desire, and subjectivity.<sup>24</sup>

### **Dante as Aeneas: *Convivio***

Dante's most in-depth engagement with the *Aeneid* prior to the *Commedia* is found in Book 4 of the *Convivio*, where the author sets out, with continual recourse to the classical *auctores*, a model of moral and intellectual

development known as the “four ages of man.”<sup>25</sup> Of particular interest here is the passage from the first to the second of these ages, from adolescence (*adolescenza*) to maturity (*gioventute*). While in adolescence the intellective faculty lacks the strength to rein in desire and distinguish judiciously between virtue and vice, maturity is marked by the acquisition of temperance and the mastery of appetite, as desire is definitively curbed by reason and maternal affection replaced by the patriarchal discipline that affords access to the social order: “Onde, sì come, nato, tosto lo figlio alla tetta della madre s’apprende, così, tosto come alcuno lume d’animo in esso appare, si dee volgere alla correzione del padre, e lo padre lui amaestrare” (*Conv.* 4.24.14). And the decisive turning away from the sphere of juvenile affectivity is perfectly exemplified, Dante states in 4.26.8, by Aeneas’s abandonment of Dido in order to follow his public vocation of founding Rome:

E così infrenato mostra Virgilio, lo maggiore nostro poeta, che fosse Enea, nella parte dello Eneida ove questa etade si figura: la qual parte comprende lo quarto, lo quinto e lo sesto libro dello Eneida. E quanto raffrenare fu quello, quando, avendo ricevuto da Dido tanto di piacere quanto di sotto nel settimo trattato si dicerà, e usando con essa tanto di dilettazzione, elli si partio, per seguire onesta e laudabile via e fruttuosa, come nel quarto dell’Eneida scritto è!

Dante’s reading of Virgil is closely informed by a medieval tradition of Christian allegorizers such as Bernard Silvestris, John of Salisbury, and Fulgentius who interpret the first half of the *Aeneid* in precisely these terms, with Books 4–6 demonstrating reason’s victory over passion.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, these exegetes construe Dido as little more than a symbol of concupiscence and Lavinia as the virtue attained by following the road of toil.<sup>27</sup> Thus we see that Dante read Virgil’s paradigm of desire, at least as presented in *Aeneid* 4, as a fundamentally dualistic one, according to which love and rationality—and by extension love and virile probity—emerge as inimical. We might expect this paradigm to be of little use to the author of the *Vita Nuova* and the *Commedia*—works which after all endeavor to forge a middle way between eros and spirituality. Yet it is a paradigm that in fact proves consistent with the *Convivio*’s general handling of desire and its treatment of Dante’s own authorial development.

At the very beginning of the *Convivio* (1.1.16–17), Dante defines the relationship between this treatise and the earlier *Vita Nuova*:

E se nella presente opera, la quale è *Convivio* nominata e vo' che sia, più virilmente trattasse che nella *Vita Nova*, non intendo però a quella in parte alcuna derogare, ma maggiormente giovare per questa quella; veggendo sì come ragionevolmente quella fervida e passionata, questa temperata e virile essere conviene. Ché altro si conviene e dire e operare ad una etade che ad altra; per che certi costumi sono idonei e laudabili ad una etade che sono sconci e biasimevoli ad altra, sì come di sotto, nel quarto trattato di questo libro, sarà propria ragione mostrata. E io in quella dinanzi, all'entrata della mia gioventute parlai, e in questa dipoi, quella già trapassata.

Dante insists that he does not wish to debunk the *Vita Nuova* and he is careful elsewhere to proclaim his loyalty to the memory of “quella Beatrice beata che vive in cielo colli angeli e in terra colla mia anima” (*Conv.* 2.2.1). It is wholly fitting, he says, that a work composed only on the cusp of manhood be fervid and passionate, lacking the temperance and virility which are the hallmarks of the present treatise. Yet while the *Convivio*'s treatment of the *Vita Nuova* is evidently not palinodic, it is surely reductive. In opposing adolescent “passion” and virile “temperance,” he does scant justice to the radical synthesis of eros and intellection that had defined the theologized poetics of the earlier work. *Convivio* 4 makes this all the clearer. Dante implicitly presents the *libello* as pertaining to that age (adolescence) when the rational faculty is not yet fully developed (“non puote perfettamente la razionale parte discernere” [*Conv.* 4.24.2]), a notion that of course runs very much contrary to the *Vita Nuova*'s own anti-Cavalcantian insistence on the unwavering influence of reason on Dante's love for Beatrice.<sup>28</sup> This opposition between love and rationality resurfaces in the next chapter of the treatise (1.2.16), where Dante explains his motivations for explicating his allegorical canzoni:

Temo la infamia di tanta passione avere seguita, quanta concepe chi legge le sopra nominate canzoni in me avere segnoreggiata: la quale infamia si cessa, per lo presente di me parlare, interamente, lo quale mostra che non passione ma virtù sia stata la movente cagione.

Eager once again to distance the *Convivio* from earthly love—owing to a fear in this case that his allegorical canzoni might be read literally—Dante draws a line between “passione” and “virtù,” which corresponds to the lines drawn between the *Vita Nuova* and the *Convivio* in the earlier in the first book and between adolescence and manhood in Book 4. There is no suggestion in any of these instances that love, cast as inherently excessive,

might exist in harmony with the kind of mature virtue that serves as the “movente cagione” of this work.

In both instances, the author of the commentary (the “quasi commento,” as he calls it [1.3.2]) fashions himself as an Aeneas, Book 4’s archetypal *exemplum* of noble manhood, in moving away from the passion of youth “per seguire onesta e laudabile via e fruttosa.” We can note parallels between the *Convivio*’s descriptions of Aeneas and of Dante himself, with the words “la infamia di tanta passione avere seguita” regarding Dante foreshadowing the phrase “avendo ricevuto da Dido tanto di piacere . . . e tanto di dilettazzione” used with respect to Aeneas. It would seem possible, indeed, that both these passages draw on the *Aeneid* itself, which uses several similar Latin expressions to describe Dido’s own immoderate desires.<sup>29</sup> The unusually strong phrasing that describes the agony of Aeneas’s abandonment of Dido (“E quanto raffrenare fu quello . . . !”) also points to the author’s identification with Aeneas,<sup>30</sup> no doubt in his own putative transition from the “passionate” love poetry of the *Vita Nuova* to the “virile” writing of the *Convivio* (“putative” since Dante, in truth, never ceased to write erotic verse). The essence of each figure’s transition from passion to temperance lies in a movement from private to public affairs: just as Aeneas forsakes his dalliance with Dido to fulfill his imperial duty, so Dante’s supposed abandonment of the love lyric can be seen as giving way to the far greater ethical and political *impegno* of the *Convivio*. In both cases, the affective, subjective, and private appear in stark opposition to the “virtuous,” universal, and public. Gender too proceeds along Virgilian lines and is configured more conservatively than in the *Vita Nuova* and *Commedia*, with the *donna* cast not as a path to redemption but a potentially treacherous “other” in the journey to moral maturity. The only way in which the figure of the lady can be squared with the *Convivio*’s poetics is by way of the allegorical exposition of the canzoni in praise of Lady Philosophy, herself a “personified abstraction of disembodied rationality.”<sup>31</sup> The *Convivio* is really most at ease when it can forego subjective, amatory poetry entirely, as it does in the canzone “Le dolci rime,” the poem in Dante’s corpus most naturally reconciled with the *Convivio*’s prevailing emphasis on a turning away from the juvenile ambit of love:

Le dolci rime d’amor ch’i’ solia  
cercar ne’ miei pensieri,

convien ch'io lasci; non perch'io non speri  
ad esse ritornare,  
ma perché li atti disdegnosi e ferì  
che ne la donna mia  
sono appariti m'han chiusa la via  
de l'usato parlare.  
E poi che tempo mi par d'aspettare  
diporrò giù lo mio soave stile,  
ch'i' ho tenuto nel trattar d'amore;  
e dirò del valore,  
per lo qual veramente omo è gentile,  
con rima aspr'e sottile.

(*Conv.* 4; lines 1–14)

For all that Dante stresses here the temporary nature of his abandonment of love poetry (“non perch'io non speri / ad esse ritornare”), the canzone’s passage from “amore” to “valore,” and from the affective lyric subject to the generic “omo,” adheres to the model of *Aeneid* 4 and shows how Dante’s lyric and ethical objectives and identities have at this point become opposed.

The Virgilian paradigm used to frame Dante’s poetics in the *Convivio* will emerge as an interesting source of tension between the treatise and the *Commedia*, whose emphasis on redeemed eros and the inalienable bond between vernacular poetry and desire runs contrary to the more restrictive handling of love we find here.<sup>32</sup> The suppression of desire is, in fact, somewhat at odds with the way in which the mother tongue is defined in the *Convivio* itself, where its indissoluble relationship to affectivity and corporeal selfhood is foregrounded. In *Conv.* 1.13.4, for example, Dante remarks:

Questo mio volgare fu congiungitore de li miei generanti, che con esso parlavano, sì come 'l fuoco è disponente del ferro al fabbro che fa lo coltello; per che manifesto è lui essere concorso a la mia generazione, e così essere alcuna cagione del mio essere.

Despite Dante’s insistence here on the uniquely subjective properties of the vernacular—in contrast with the properties of a disembodied, grammatical language like Latin—his use of the mother tongue in the treatise seems ultimately to be founded foremost upon a desire for vulgarization.<sup>33</sup> This is not to say, of course, that the *Convivio* is a work devoid of subjectivity. Book 1 of the treatise invests considerable energy in constructing

Dante's postexilic persona and includes passages that reverberate with a deeply subjective sense of indignation. Yet the work's well-documented pursuit of cultural authority leads its author thereafter to immerse himself ever deeper in the modalities of medieval exegesis and classical culture,<sup>34</sup> at the expense of the nucleus of vernacular language, desire, and subjectivity that defined his lyric production.

### **Dante as Dido: "Così nel mio parlar"**

We have seen how Dante's lyric poetry as compiled in the *Convivio* is either expunged of its eroticism and subjectivity by way of allegorical exegesis (the canzoni "Voi che 'ntendendo" and "Amor che ne la mente") or else markedly distances itself from a conventionally lyric *materia* ("Le dolci rime") in order to espouse universal, transhistorical concerns. Yet while the Dante of the treatise reinvents himself as a virile Aeneas, his *rime sparse* from the same period present us with a Dante who becomes ever more reminiscent of Dido. From approximately 1295 to 1307 (the years between the compilation of the *Vita Nuova* and the likely inception of the *Commedia*), the great majority of Dante's amatory lyrics—from the poems for the *pargoletta* and the *rime petrose* to the sonnet exchange with Cino da Pistoia and the *canzone montanina*—present love as a destructive, objectifying force, irreconcilable with reason and potentially leading to death.<sup>35</sup> There are, of course, important modulations in the stylistic, rhetorical, and ideological stances adopted by Dante in his lyric production of this period. Yet it would not seem problematic to assert that this production is overwhelmingly defined by a more conventionally fatalistic and unalloyed eroticism, one at considerable variance with the redemptive love first formulated in the *Vita Nuova* and (following a lengthy hiatus) brought to full fruition in the *Commedia*, as well as with the "temperate" and "virile" poetics of the *Convivio*. This shift is concomitant with—indeed fundamentally inseparable from—the absence of Beatrice from Dante's writings. For Beatrice was in effect conceived by the poet as a unique means of redeeming and morally valorizing his vernacular lyric production.

One of this period's most striking *rime*, in terms of both style and content, is the canzone "Così nel mio parlar," part of the *petrose* sequence, in which the lover describes in language of startling acidity his debilitating

passion for the unheeding, Medusa-like *donna pietra*.<sup>36</sup> Dante is here not only Dido-like in a generic sense, but he even directly compares himself to the Carthaginian queen:

Ché più mi triema il cuor qualora io penso  
di lei in parte ov'altri gli occhi induca,  
per tema non traluca  
lo mio penser di fuor sì che si scopra,  
ch'e' non fa de la morte, ch'ogni senso  
co li denti d'Amor già mi manduca;  
ciò è che 'l pensier bruca  
la lor virtù, sì che n'allenta l'opra.  
E m'ha percosso in terra e stammi sopra  
con quella spada ond'elli uccise Dido,  
Amore, a cu' io grido  
"merzé!" chiamando, e umilmente il priego;  
ed e' d'ogni merzé par messo al niego.  
(*Rime* 1.27–39)

Given Dido's status in the Middle Ages and elsewhere in Dante's *oeuvre* as a near emblem of lustful desire, the poet-lover's identification with her confirms the lethal and pathological nature of the passion that consumes him. As Mazzotta has shown, the myth of Dido in the canzone "is grafted on an unequivocally Augustinian doctrine of love."<sup>37</sup> The use of the term "de la mia mente la cima" (line 17)—the seat of Dante's desire in this poem—denotes in Augustinian terms the point of conjunction of will and intellect, which are accordingly debilitated.<sup>38</sup>

In describing this irrational love, I would argue that Dante's allusion to Dido herself represents more than a fleeting occurrence of a medieval commonplace. It is interesting to note that Virgil's Dido, in her futile remonstrations toward Aeneas, describes him as having been born on hard stones ("duris cautibus"):

No goddess was your mother, false Aeneas, and Dardanus no author of your race;  
the bristling Caucasus was father to you on his hard stones; Hyrcanian tigresses  
gave you their teats.<sup>39</sup>

Dido here not only denies Aeneas's divine lineage, but disputes his very humanity, claiming that he was born onto (perhaps formed out of) the hard rocks of Caucasus and suckled by tigers in the wilds of Scythia, the wildest lands and creatures of which she can conceive. No doubt the

reference to hard stone here is intended to evoke not only Aeneas's supposed savageness but also his perceived lack of compassion. Like the *donna* Dante describes in his canzone ("Così nel mio parlar vogli'esser aspro / com'è negli atti questa bella pietra"), Aeneas is presented as "stony" in his impermeable frigidity. This metaphor resurfaces in *Aeneid* 6, when Aeneas encounters Dido in the Mourning Fields—a scene that reverses the events that occurred on the shore of Carthage:

These were the words Aeneas, weeping, used, trying to soothe the burning, fierce-eyed Shade. She turned away, eyes to the ground, her face no more moved by his speech than if she stood as stubborn flint or some Marpessan crag.<sup>40</sup>

Now it is the embittered Dido who is presented as stonelike in her refusal to be penetrated by Aeneas's *sermo*. Thus the motif of the stony beloved is particularly resonant when evoking the fatal, unreciprocated love of Dido—a figure who, along with the Medusa, perhaps informs the poetics of the *petrose* more broadly than has typically been assumed.

Also resonant in the context of Dido and Aeneas is the striking fantasy of retribution that concludes Dante's canzone:

Così vedess'io lui fender per mezzo  
il cuore a la crudele che 'l mio squatra,  
poi non mi sarebbe atra  
la morte, ov'io per sua bellezza corro:  
ché tanto dà nel sol quanto nel rezzo  
questa scherana micidiale e latra.  
Oimè, ché non latra  
per me, com'io per lei, nel caldo borro?  
ché tosto griderei: "I' vi soccorro!";  
e fare' 'l volentier, sì come quelli  
che ne' biondi capelli  
ch'Amor per consumarmi increspa e dora  
metterei mano, e piacere'le allora.

S'io avesse le belle trecce prese,  
che son fatte per me scudiscio e ferza,  
pigliandole anzi terza,  
con esse passerei vespero e squille;  
e non sarei pietoso né cortese,  
anzi farei com'orso quando scherza;  
e se Amor me ne sferza,  
io mi vendicherei di più di mille.



Ancor negli occhi ond'escon le faville  
che m'infiamman lo cor, ch'io porto anciso,  
guarderei presso e fiso,  
per vendicar lo fuggir che mi face,  
e poi le renderei con amor pace.

(*Rime* 1.53–78)

These stanzas are altogether anomalous in Dante's lyric career, displaying an aggression and sexuality not found elsewhere. It cannot be accidental that they coincide with Dante's identification with Dido, given the vindictive tenor of her own remonstrations against the departing Aeneas:

Go then, before the winds, to Italy. Seek out your kingdom overseas; indeed, if there be pious powers still, I hope that you will drink your torments to the lees among sea rocks and, drowning, often cry the name of Dido. Then, though absent, I shall hunt you down with blackened firebrands; and when chill death divides my soul and body, a Shade, I shall be present everywhere. Depraved, you then will pay your penalties. And I shall hear of it, and that report will come to me below, among the Shadows.<sup>41</sup>

While the content of her discourse clearly differs from Dante's in "Così nel mio parlar," it is likely that Dante appropriates—in addition to her consuming erotic desire—the frenzied desire for reciprocation and revenge whither this mad love leads her.

But Dante's identification with Dido in the canzone, used to articulate the consuming force of his irrational desire, is especially interesting given his identification with Aeneas in the *Convivio*. In this dual self-identification we find encapsulated the separation of Dante's two identities in this period, his restrictive conception of his remits as both a "fervent" lyric poet and as a "virile" promulgator of ethical and philosophical wisdom. Dante's use of *Aeneid* 4 in this period shows us how he conceives of *Amor* in far more conventional and classicizing terms than in the *Commedia* and in the *Vita Nuova*, whether he writes within or without the sphere of amatory poetry—as a Dido or as an Aeneas. The problem with this restriction is that it dilutes Dante's poetic convictions and inhibits him from integrating the two halves of his literary inheritance as both vernacular love poet (a poet of subjectivity and desire) and ethical poet-philosopher (a moral *auctor*).

This notion of love's antagonistic relationship to rationality and moral rectitude, pervasive in the middle years of Dante's career, is perhaps most

explicit in his epistle to fellow exile Cino da Pistoia. In response to Cino's question of whether a lover may pass from passion to passion, retaining the same intensity of desire even though the object differs, Dante writes:

Behold, there is given below a discourse in the diction of Calliope, wherein the Muse declares in set phrase (though, as poets use, the meaning is conveyed under a figure) that love for one object may languish and finally die away, and that (inasmuch as the corruption of one thing is the begetting of another) love for a second may take shape in the soul. And the truth of this, although it is proved by experience, may be confirmed by reason and authority. For every faculty which is not destroyed after the consummation of one act is naturally reserved for another. Consequently the faculties of sense, if the organ survives, are not destroyed by the consummation of one act, but are naturally reserved for another. Since, then, the appetitive faculty, which is the seat of love, is a faculty of sense, it is manifest that after the exhaustion of the passion by which is brought into operation it is reserved for another. . . . It remains to consider the authority of Ovid in the fourth book of the *Metamorphoses*, which bears directly and literally upon our proposition; namely the passage wherein the author says (in the story of the three sisters who were contemptuous of the son of Semele), addressing the Sun, who after he had deserted and neglected other nymphs of whom he had previously been enamored, was newly in love with Leucothoë: "What now, Son of Hyperion," and what follows.<sup>42</sup>

That Dante's lyrics from this part of his career presented love in deeply fatalistic terms is well known. Indeed, there is perhaps no clearer example of this fatalism than the sonnet "Io sono stato con Amore insieme" (*Rime* 104), which accompanies this letter and insists upon the irreconcilability of love and free will.<sup>43</sup> But perhaps nowhere more than in this epistle do we find such an explicit definition of love as an irrational force residing exclusively in the faculty of the appetite ("potentia concupiscibilis, que sedes amoris est").<sup>44</sup> This insistence on love's inherent irrationality essentially aligns Dante with the Cavalcanti of "Donna me prega," a key textual counterpoint in both the *Vita Nuova* and the *Commedia*.<sup>45</sup> It is also highly significant that Dante substantiates this understanding of love with recourse to a classical source, Ovid, given that classical writers' understanding of the subject in the *Commedia* is continually called into question, not least in the opening lines of *Paradiso* 8:

Solea creder lo mondo in suo periclo  
che la bella Ciprigna il folle amore  
ragiasse, volta nel terzo epiciclo;

per che non pur a lei faceano onore  
di sacrificio e di votivo grido  
le genti antiche ne l'antico errore;  
ma Dione onoravano e Cupido,  
quella per madre sua, questo per figlio,  
e dicean ch'el sedette in grembo a Dido;  
e da costei ond'io principio piglio  
pigliavano il vocabol de la stella  
che 'l sol vagheggia or da coppa or da ciglio.  
(*Par.* 8.1–12)

In these middle years of his poetic career, Dante's poetic horizons are not so different from those of the "genti antiche" denounced here. Indeed, the rhyme *Dido/grido* here contains an echo of "Così nel mio parlar."<sup>46</sup> To love is to act as a Dido: to be possessed, consumed, dominated. To act (or write) responsibly is, by contrast, to resist love, to choose universal, transhistorical matters over the ephemeral concerns of the lyric self. This dualism is recanted, however, in the *Commedia*, where the figure of Beatrice is resurrected (and, in fact, more strongly eroticized) and the spheres of love and ethics are newly conflated. What remains to be examined is how Dante's careful use of *Aeneid* 4 in the Earthly Paradise serves to articulate this realignment of his poetics.<sup>47</sup>

### Dante as Dido and Aeneas: *Commedia*

While Dante-pilgrim momentarily takes on the identity of Dido before Beatrice in Eden, his fuller identification in the *Commedia* is undoubtedly with Aeneas. Critics have long recognized that the wayfarer's famous double denial in *Inferno* 2.32 ("Io non Enëa, io non Paolo sono") in fact serves as a twofold self-definition, an affirmation of his role as both a new Paul, a chosen vessel of divine testimony, and a new Aeneas, reinforcing the Trojan hero's founding of Rome by announcing its divinely sanctioned purpose in Christian history. His descent into Hell, meanwhile, is clearly modeled on Aeneas's descent into the Hades in *Aeneid* 6, while the poet establishes a direct parallel between Cacciaguida, who foretells the pilgrim's bittersweet destiny in the Heaven of Mars, and Aeneas's father Anchises, who performs an analogous role in the Elysian Fields of the pagan underworld ("Sì pïa l'ombra d'Anchise si porse" [*Par.* 15.25]).

Revealing the providential role of Rome in salvation history, Dante-pilgrim in fact yokes the missions of Paul and Aeneas, of political and religious purpose.

In voicing the words of Dido while also acting as a Christian Aeneas, Dante shows us that these classical figures, diametrically opposed in his previous writings, are now aligned, integrated, and redeemed in the poetic subject of the *Commedia*. Is this to overstate the idea of “integration,” given that the pilgrim cites a mere line of Dido’s, while the poet is elsewhere highly critical of her libidinous character? I think not. Even if Dido is directly cited only once, the affective, “Didonian” sphere of the love lyric, suppressed in the *Convivio*, is in the *Commedia* every bit as present as is the moral philosophy of “Le dolci rime.” Dante’s reaction to Beatrice in the Earthly Paradise, for instance, is evidently defined—to use the categories of the *Convivio*—not by “temperance,” but by “passion”:

E lo spirito mio, che già cotanto  
tempo era stato ch'a la sua presenza  
non era di stupor, tremando, affranto,  
sanza de li occhi aver più conoscenza,  
per occulta virtù che da lei mosse,  
d'antico amor sentì la gran potenza.  
Tosto che ne la vista mi percosse  
l'alta virtù che già m'avea trafitto  
prima ch'io fuor di puerizia fosse,  
volsimi a la sinistra col respitto  
col quale il fantolin corre a la mamma  
quando ha paura o quando elli è afflitto . . .  
(*Purg.* 30.34–45)

These lines, as noted by numerous commentators, recall Dante's reaction to the sight of Beatrice in the *Vita Nuova* ("mi parve sentire uno mirabile tremore incominciare nel mio petto da la sinistra parte e distendersi di subito per tutte le parti del mio corpo" [14.4])—a work rather belittled in the *Convivio* as the product of an adolescent ardor that the author has now left behind. Moreover, the line "d'antico amor sentì la gran potenza," as well as foreshadowing the "antica fiamma" citation nine lines later, clearly evokes the incipit of Dante's lyric "Io sento sì d'Amor la gran possanza," which describes the overwhelming power of love. I would also add that the use of "percosse" to describe Dante's dumbstruck state here ("Tosto che ne *la vista mi percosse* / l'alta virtù che già m'avea trafitto /

prima ch'io fuor di puerizia fosse . . .") directly recalls the Dido-like experience of love described in "Così nel mio parlar" ("E m'ha percosso in terra, e stammi sopra / con quella spada ond'elli uccise Dido"). Ardent language of this kind—less befitting a stoic Aeneas than a sublimated Dido—proliferates in the *Paradiso*, as has been amply demonstrated, albeit with very different conclusions, in the work of Lino Pertile and F. Regina Psaki.<sup>48</sup>

There are further ways in which the fateful love of *Aeneid* 4 and the violent *petrose* sequence inspired by it find themselves reworked and ultimately redeemed in the Earthly Paradise. Sara Sturm-Maddox has convincingly unearthed several echoes of the *petrose* in these cantos that dramatize both the redirection of Dante's desire toward its original and redemptive object and the transcendence of the furious and fatalistic eros of the stony rhymes.<sup>49</sup> We should also recall that the fateful sword of *Aeneid* 4 and "Così nel mio parlar" ("quella spada ond'elli uccise Dido") now becomes a sword of reproach ("ché pianger ti conven per altra spada"), plunged by the newly stern Beatrice (a sort of Medusa *in bono*, as suggested recently by Marco Veglia) in an act of charitable love.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps most illuminating in the context of this particular study, however, is Dante's reworking in *Purgatorio* 31 of Virgil's oak simile:

Quali fanciulli, vergognando, muti  
con li occhi a terra stannosi, ascoltando  
e sé riconoscendo e ripentuti,  
tal mi stav'io; ed ella disse: "Quando  
per udir se' dolente, alza la barba,  
e prenderai più doglia riguardando."  
Con men di resistenza si dibarba  
robusto cerro, o vero al nostral vento  
o vero a quel de la terra di Iarba,  
ch'io non levai al suo commando il mento;  
e quando per la barba il viso chiese,  
ben conobbi il velen de l'argomento.  
(*Purg.* 31.64–75)

The presence of the Virgilian intertext here is highlighted by the periphrastic reference to northern Africa as "la terra di Iarba" (Iarbas being Dido's unwanted suitor in Virgil's poem).<sup>51</sup> As we saw earlier, Virgil's simile served to convey Aeneas's resolute temperance in the face of Dido's protests. Such resistance was, for the Dante of the *Convivio* as well as for

Virgil and his medieval commentators, privileged as the very essence of virility. Here, however, the simile is very deliberately subverted. Far from resisting the wind, Dante soon falls vanquished—"Tanta riconoscenza il cor mi morse, / ch'io caddi vinto" (*Purg.* 31.88–89)—willingly conquered by the power of remorse.<sup>52</sup> In a Christian cosmos that crucially extends beyond both the rational framework of the *Convivio* and the astral determinism of the *petrose*, Dante can no longer restrict himself to Virgilian stoicism. His poetics must instead absorb and sublimate the desire and the openness to external stimuli that Aeneas had so emblematically resisted,<sup>53</sup> and it is this absorption and sublimation that the references to Dido and to the *rime petrose* in the Earthly Paradise subtly endeavor to convey.

At the very center of the *Commedia* then we find that the obdurate value-spheres of the *Aeneid* 4 are transcended. Dante-pilgrim is at once "temperate and virile," learning to resist his misplaced compassion for the damned, and "fervid and passionate," submitting to his desire for his "ancient flame." Dante is hereby underlining a fundamental difference between the *Aeneid* and the *Commedia*: desire in a Virgilian context, without the possibility of a redemptive object, is necessarily tragic, for in the absence of bona fide plenitude the only absolute to which it may lead is death.<sup>54</sup> Virgil's worldview, in direct contrast with Dante's, is defined by "the relentlessness of fate and the inevitability of loss."<sup>55</sup> It is Virgil after all who in Limbo voices the famous words "Sanza speme vivemo in disio" (*Inf.* 4.42). Inserted into a moral order in which they are defined by the nature of their desire, the great souls of the classical world are eternally circumscribed by their tragic conception of love. In this sense, the use of Dido in the Earthly Paradise is analogous to the citation of Virgil's "Manibus date lilia plenis!" Like Marcellus's lilies, her "tragic" passion is transfigured and afforded a "comic" significance.

But this critique of Virgil as an authority in matters of desire is all the more important because his was a perspective to which Dante himself had formerly given no little credence. While the Dante of the *Convivio* and the *rime petrose* could only choose between the paths of Aeneas or Dido, the Dante of the *Commedia* is no longer beholden to these categories, which severed politics and ethics from the subjectivity and desire which ought to define poetry in the mother tongue. Dante's identification with Dido is just one of the numerous "sexual solecisms" that permeate the Earthly Paradise cantos, which Jeffrey T. Schnapp, in an insightful essay,

sees as an attempt to “articulate the intersection between the ‘feminine’ world of vernacular lyric and the ‘masculine’ world of Latin epic, the world of Beatrice and the world of Virgil.”<sup>56</sup> As I hope to have demonstrated, the figures of Dido and Aeneas—deployed in the Earthly Paradise in order to articulate this intersection, this synthesis—had formerly been used precisely in an opposing capacity: to sever the epic from the lyric, the masculine from the feminine, reason from desire.

Critics have noted how the “four ages of man” expounded in *Convivio* 4 relate to the pilgrim of the *Commedia*, especially in the way in which Dante defines the crisis experienced—and confronted—by his protagonist in the poem’s opening canto.<sup>57</sup> There is, however, a crucial distinction between the ways in which Dante-pilgrim and the generic figure of *Convivio* 4 respond to the crisis in question. For we quickly learn that it is desire for the *donna*, not temperance, that leads the pilgrim out of his quandary. And it is desire too that inspires the poet. Whatever the valence of the *Amor* in question—and I believe that it is reductive to divest it of erotic significance—Dante’s famous self-definition in *Purgatorio* 24, “I’ mi son un che, quando / Amor mi spira, noto . . .” (*Purg.* 24.52–53), underlines the fact that the poetics of the *Commedia* are founded on a surrender to the promptings of love crucially at odds with the oaklike virility prized in the *Convivio*. We might consider in conclusion, therefore, that as well as underscoring the distance between Christian “comedy” and pagan “tragedy,” Dante’s use of *Aeneid* 4 in the Earthly Paradise also stages his return to a vernacular poetics at once eroticized and theologized, imbued with a strong element of the feminized lyric subjectivity that the Virgilian poetics of the *Convivio* had attempted to suppress.

Dartmouth College  
Hanover, New Hampshire

## NOTES

1. Citations from the *Commedia* are taken from Dante Alighieri, *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata*, ed. Giorgio Petrocchi (Milan: Mondadori, 1966–67). Citations from the minor works are taken from the following editions: *Convivio*, ed. Franca Bambilla Ageno (Florence: Le Lettere, 1994); *De vulgari eloquentia*, ed. Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, in *Opere minori* (Milan: Ricciardi, 1979–88), vol. 2, 1–237; *Epistole*, ed. Arsenio Frugoni and Giorgio Brugnoli, in *Opere minori*, vol. 2, 505–643; *Rime*, ed. Domenico De Robertis (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2005); *Vita Nuova*, ed. Domenico De Robertis, in *Opere minori*, vol. 1, pt. 1, 1–247. On Dante’s citation of Dido here, see Barbara J. Bono, *Literary Transvaluation: From Vergilian Epic to Shakespearean Tragicomedy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles:

University of California Press, 1984), 51–61; Kevin Brownlee, "Dante, Beatrice, and the Two Departures from Dante," *MLN* 108, no. 1 (Jan. 1993): 1–14; John Freccero, "Manfred's Wounds," in *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), 195–208 (206–8); Peter S. Hawkins, "Dido, Beatrice, and the Signs of Ancient Love," in *The Poetry of Allusion: Virgil and Ovid in Dante's "Commedia"*, ed. Rachel Jacoff and Jeffrey T. Schnapp (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991), 113–30; Robert Hollander, *Il Virgilio dantesco: tragedia nella "Commedia"* (Florence: Olschki, 1983), 117–54 (143); Olivia Holmes, *Dante's Two Beloveds: Ethics and Erotics in the "Comedy"* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 116–18; Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert: History and Allegory in the "Divine Comedy"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 147–91; Lino Pertile, "L'antica fiamma: La metamorfosi del fuoco nella *Commedia* di Dante," *The Italianist* 11 (1991): 29–60; Jeffrey T. Schnapp, "Dante's Sexual Solecisms: Gender and Genre in the *Commedia*," in *The New Medievalism*, ed. Marina S. Brownlee, Kevin Brownlee, and Stephen G. Nichols (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 201–25; Winthrop Wetherbee, *The Ancient Flame: Dante and the Poets* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2008), 221–22; David Wilson-Okamura, "Lavinia and Beatrice: The Second Half of the *Aeneid* in the Middle Ages," *Dante Studies* 119 (2001): 103–24. On other aspects of Dido in the *Commedia*, see Douglas Biow, "Pier della Vigna, Dido, and the Discourse of Virgilian Tragedy in the *Commedia*," *Stanford Italian Review* 11 (1992): 155–70; Carolyn Lund-Mead, "Dido Alighieri: Gender Inversion in the Francesca Episode," in *Dante and the Unorthodox: The Aesthetics of Transgression*, ed. James Miller (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), 121–50; Giorgio Padoan, "Didone," *Enciclopedia dantesca*, ed. Umberto Bosco (Rome: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia italiana, 1970–78), vol. 2, 430–31; Claudia Villa, "Tra affetto e pietà: per *Inferno* v," *Lettere Italiane* 51, no. 4 (1999): 513–41.

2. "Quae est ista quae progreditur quasi aurora consurgens pulchra ut luna electa ut sol terribilis ut acies ordinata?" The English translation is taken from the King James Bible.

3. On Dante and the *Song of Songs*, see Paola Nasti, *Favole d'amore e "saver profondo": La tradizione salomonica in Dante* (Ravenna: Longo, 2007); Lino Pertile, *La puttana e il gigante: Dal "Cantico dei cantici" al "Paradiso terrestre" di Dante* (Ravenna: Longo, 1998).

4. On aspects of the contrast between Virgilian "tragedy" and Dantean "comedy," see Robert Ball, "Theological Semantics: Virgil's *Pietas* and Dante's *Pietà*," *Stanford Italian Review* 2 (1981): 59–80; Teodolinda Barolini, *Dante's Poets: Textuality and Truth in the "Comedy"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 201–56; Biow, "Discourse of Virgilian Tragedy"; Hawkins, "Dido, Beatrice, and the Signs of Ancient Love," 117–54. On the *Aeneid*'s status as a "tragedy" in the Middle Ages, in light of its accounts of the fall of Troy and the death of Turnus, see Hollander, *Virgilio*, 130–31.

5. "Eurydicen vox ipsa et frigida lingua / a miseram Eurydicen! anima fugiente vocabat: / Eurydicen toto referebant flumine ripae." Latin quotations from Virgil's works are taken from Virgil, *Eclogues; Georgics; Aeneid; The Minor Poems*, ed. and trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1935). Translations of the *Georgics* are taken from Virgil, *Georgics*, trans. Peter Fallon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

6. Jacoff in fact suggests that the (anti-)orphic resonance of Dante and Beatrice's love goes further. Dante, unlike Orpheus, *must* look at Beatrice, while her own descent into Hell as recounted in *Inferno* 2 figures her as a successful Orpheus. See Rachel Jacoff, "Intertextualities in Arcadia: *Purgatorio* 30.49–51," in *The Poetry of Allusion*, ed. Rachel Jacoff and Jeffrey Schnapp, 131–44 (136–37).

7. "I recognize the signs of the ancient flame" (*Aen.* 4.23). Translations of the *Aeneid* are taken (and in some cases slightly modified) from Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981). Freccero, "Manfred's Wounds," notes the gradual textual effacement of Virgil in the three citations, which move from full Latin quotation to Italian translation to mere echo. It is once Virgil disappears from the text that Dante's own name resounds, marking his arrival at both moral and poetic maturity and autonomy. On the possible implications of Dante's use of "segni" rather than Virgil's "vestigie," see Hawkins, "Dido, Beatrice, and the Signs of Ancient Love," 125–30.

8. *Aen.* 4.229: "... gravidam imperii belloque frementem."



9. *Aen.* 4.569–70: “Varium et mutabile semper femina.” On gender in the *Aeneid*, see Ellen Oliensis, “Sons and Lovers: Sexuality and Gender in Virgil’s Poetry,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil*, ed. Charles Martindale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 294–311.

10. Lund-Mead, “Dido Alighieri: Gender Inversion in the Francesca Episode,” 127.

11. *Aen.* 4.441–49: “Ac velut annoso validam cum robore quercum / Alpini Boreae nunc hinc nunc flatibus illinc / eruere inter se certant; it stridor, et altae / consternunt terram concusso stipite frondes; / ipsa haeret scopulis et, quantam vertice ad auras / aetherias, tantum radice in Tartara tendit: / haud secus adsiduis hinc atque hinc vocibus heros / tunditur, et magno persentit pectore curas; / mens immota manet, lacrimae volvuntur inanes.”

12. See Hawkins, “Dido, Beatrice, and the Signs of Ancient Love,” 118. *Aen.* 4.54: “His dictis incensum animum inflammavit amore / spemque dedit dubiae menti solvitque pudorem”; *Aen.* 4.68: “uritur infelix Dido”; *Aen.* 4.101: “ardet amans Dido.”

13. “If Virgil takes care not to realise Lavinia as a character, one reason is that she is and must remain . . . little more than the hypostasis of the ‘Lavinian shores,’ through which Troy must pass en route to becoming Rome” (Oliensis, “Sons and Lovers,” 307).

14. Wetherbee, *The Ancient Flame*, 3. See also Hawkins, “Dido, Beatrice, and the Signs of Ancient Love,” 118: “What matters in the end is that the inevitable fury of eros be sublimated into *civitas*, and that the virtuous individual comply with the rigors of an impersonal destiny.”

15. On Beatrice as both Aeneas and Sychaeus, see Hawkins, “Dido, Beatrice, and the Signs of Ancient Love,” 121.

16. The Virgilian identities taken on by Dante’s characters do not necessarily end here. Kevin Brownlee, “Dante, Beatrice, and the Two Departures,” sees Aeneas’s departure from Dido in *Aeneid* 4 as a subtext in the “confrontation” (2) of Dante and Beatrice in *Purgatorio* 30–31, with the reproachful Beatrice thus figured as a Dido *in bono* and Dante as a remorseful Aeneas (5). Hawkins sees their reunion as a “comic replay” (122) of the tragic reunion of Dido and Aeneas in the Mourning Fields. Others, meanwhile, have read Dante’s return to Beatrice in the Earthly Paradise in terms of Aeneas’s journey to Lavinia. See Holmes, *Dante’s Two Beloveds*, 99–106.

17. Schnapp, “Dante’s Sexual Solecisms, 154 n. 18.

18. Christopher Ryan notes that “Dante’s love is *antico* in a full and positive sense.” See “Virgil’s Wisdom in the *Divine Comedy*,” *Medievalia et Humanistica* 11 (1982): 1–38. See also Holmes, *Dante’s Two Beloveds*, 116–18.

19. Wetherbee (*The Ancient Flame*, 248–49) argues that Dante in fact judges Dido more severely than does Virgil, who reunites Dido and Sychaeus in the Underworld. On Dido in medieval culture more broadly, see Marilyn Desmond, *Reading Dido: Gender, Textuality, and the Medieval “Aeneid”* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

20. Latin quotations from the *Confessions* are taken from St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. William Watts, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1912). Translations are taken from St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin, 1961).

21. “Amicitia enim mundi huius fornicatio est abs te et ‘euge, euge’ dicitur, ut pudeat, si non ita homo sit. Et haec non flebam, et flebam Didonem extinctam ferroque extrema secutam, sequens ipse extrema condita tua relicto te, et terra iens in terram.”

22. For Hawkins, the citation of Dido “becomes a sign of how little Virgil’s poem can serve to guide Dante at this point in the journey—except, that is, by way of contrast. . . . He is confronted by the radical translation of Virgilian ‘antico amor’ standing before him, who in her glorified body offers the antithesis of everything Virgil represented as the destiny of eros” (“Dido, Beatrice, and the Signs of Ancient Love,” 120). Brownlee, similarly, writes that “the figure of the Lady [in the *Aeneid*] is eccentric. Erotic love as figured by Dido is a danger, a temptation, an obstacle to the protagonist’s task of (collective) political destiny.” In the *Comedy*, by contrast, “sublimation of erotic love as figured by Beatrice is the essential instrument of the protagonist’s (individual) salvation” (“Dante, Beatrice, and the Two Departures,” 13). See also Pertile, “L’antica fiamma”: “L’uso dantesco delle metafore erotiche rivela nuove possibilità, un percorso ignoto alla semantica classica” (37). Hollander sees the citation as connoting at once Dante’s enduring affection for his cherished guide as well as a correction of the latter’s “tragic” worldview: “Ne resulta un misto di amaro senso di perdita e di trionfante

riverenza" (*Virgilio*, 132). Some critics, meanwhile, interpret the Dido citation as reflecting a desire for Beatrice which remains at this point lustful and in need of purification. See Wetherbee, *The Ancient Flame*: "by recalling the figure who, in the *Aeneid* as in the *Commedia*, can be said to be the personification of destructive passion, Dante is acknowledging with remarkable candor that he has yet to undergo the full effects of the fire that purges desire of its antiquity, and so remains at a fundamental level imperfectly refined, too human to experience a wholly uncontaminated love" (221).

23. See note 1 for references.

24. The "classical" topic under consideration in the present essay is closely related to Dante's careful rejection of a dualistic model of desire and conversion associated with the courtly lyric. I explore some of the issues at stake in this article from a "courtly" perspective in "Desire, Subjectivity, and Lyric Poetry in Dante's *Convivio* and *Commedia*," in *Desire in Dante and the Middle Ages*, ed. Manuele Gragnolati, Tristan Kay, Elena Lombardi, and Francesca Southerden (Oxford: Legenda, 2012), 164–84. I am well aware that the tension between the *Convivio* and the *Commedia* I consider in this article is just one of many issues at stake in the highly complex and multifaceted relationship between the two works. On other aspects of this relationship, see, for example: Maria Corti, *La felicità mentale: nuove prospettive per Cavalcanti e Dante* (Turin: Einaudi, 1983), and *Dante a un nuovo crocevia* (Florence: Sansoni, 1981); John Freccero, "Casella's Song," in *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, 186–94; Robert Hollander, "Purgatorio II: Cato's Rebuke and Dante's *scoglio*," *Italica* 52 (1975): 348–63; Peter Dronke, *Dante's Second Love: The Originality and Contexts of the "Convivio"* (Exeter: Society for Italian Studies, 1997), 72–76; Simon Gilson, "Reading the *Convivio* from Trecento Florence to Dante's Cinquecento Commentators," *Italian Studies* 64, no. 2 (2009): 266–95; Ulrich Leo, "The Unfinished *Convivio* and Dante's Rereading of the *Aeneid*," *Medieval Studies* 13 (1951): 41–64; Bruno Nardi, *Dal "Convivio" alla "Commedia"* (Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo, 1960); John A. Scott, "The Unfinished *Convivio* as a Pathway to the *Comedy*," *Dante Studies* 113 (1995): 31–56.

25. Ulrich Leo ("The Unfinished *Convivio*," 59) argues that before writing chapter 25 of *Convivio* 4 Dante reread the classics (especially the *Aeneid* and its account of Aeneas's descent into the Hades in book 6)—a reading that would soon inspire the discontinuation of the *Convivio* and the genesis of the *Commedia*. Virgil is suddenly described in strikingly effusive terms ("lo maggior nostro poeta . . .") and references to his poetry proliferate. And while Dante's prior references to the *Aeneid* (and to the other classical *auctores*) had been rather perfunctory, those hereafter bespeak a careful, personal, and original interpretation.

26. On Dante and medieval allegorizing of the *Aeneid*, see Holmes, *Dante's Two Beloveds*, 99–106; Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert*, 147–91; David Thompson, *Dante's Epic Journeys* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 20–28.

27. As Hawkins notes, Bernardus Silvestris directly equates Dido with lust: "Dido id est libido" ("Dido, Beatrice, and the Signs of Ancient Love," 131).

28. See esp. *VN* 2.9: "E avvegna che la sua imagine, la quale continuamente meco stava, fosse baldanza d'Amore a segnoreggiare me, tuttavia era di sì nobilissima virtù, che nulla volta sofferse che Amore mi reggesse senza lo fedele consiglio de la ragione in quelle cose là ove cotale consiglio fosse utile a udire."

29. *Aen.* 2.10–11: "Sed si tantus amor casus cognoscere nostros / et breviter Troiae supremum audire laborem . . ." (But if you have so much longing to learn our suffering, to hear in fried the final calamity of Troy . . .); *Aen.* 4.291–92: "quando optima Dido / nesciat et tantos rumpi non speret amores . . ." (with gracious Dido still aware of nothing and never dreaming that so great a love could be broken . . .); *Aen.* 4.500–502: "Non tamen Anna novis praetextere funera sacris / germanam credit, nec tantos mente furores / concipit aut graviora timet quam morte Sychaei" (But Anna cannot dream her sister hides a funeral behind these novel rites; her mind is far from thinking of such frenzy; and she fears nothing worse than happened when Sychaeus died).

30. Leo sees this line as "vibrating with personal emotion" ("The Unfinished *Convivio*," 59)—an example of Dante's freshly engaged reading of the classical poet.

31. Richard Allen Shoaf, "Dante's 'colombi' and the Figuralism of Hope," *Dante Studies* 93 (1975): 27–59, here 37. When Beatrice returns in the Earthly Paradise she appears, by contrast, strikingly concrete and embodied. Leo contrasts the *Commedia*'s continual emphasis on vision and revelation with the abstract rationality and faith that are the pillars of the *Convivio*—a work that he says "might have been written by a blind man" ("The Unfinished *Convivio*," 51).

32. Michelangelo Picone, by contrast, suggests that Dante's journey in the *Vita Nuova* in fact follows the archetype of *Aeneid* 4, mirroring Aeneas's overcoming of the *fol' amor* represented by Dido. See "La *Vita nova* nella prospettiva della *Commedia*," *Lecture Classensi* 38 (2008): 7–15, esp. 10–11. The crucial distinction between Dante and Virgil I seek to highlight here is the importance Dante attaches to his own retention and redemption of the figure of the beloved. On the ways in which the redeemed erotics of the *Vita Nuova* and *Commedia* pointedly resist a dualistic conversionary paradigm, associated foremost with Guittone d'Arezzo, see my essays "Desire, Subjectivity, and Lyric Poetry" (op. cit.); "Dante's Ambivalence towards the Lustful," in *Dante and the Seven Deadly Sins*, ed. John C. Barnes (Dublin: Four Courts Press, forthcoming); and "Redefining the 'materia amorosa': Dante's *Vita Nova* and Guittone's (anti-)courtly *canzoniere*," *The Italianist* 29 (2009): 369–99.

33. On vernacular language, desire, and the body in Dante, see Gary Cestaro, *Dante and the Grammar of the Nursing Body* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2003); Sara Fortuna and Manuele Gragnolati, "'Attaccando al suo capezzolo le mie labbra ingorde': Corpo, linguaggio e soggettività da Dante ad *Araceli* di Elsa Morante," *Nuova corrente* 55 (2008): 85–123; Elena Lombardi, *The Syntax of Desire: Language and Love in Augustine, The Modistae, Dante* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 168–74. Cestaro (49–76) detects in the *Convivio* a tension between, on the one hand, the author's profound awareness of the bond between the vernacular and corporeal desire and, on the other, the treatise's privileging of a classicizing acorporeal rationality. This is analogous to a tension he maps in the *De vulgari eloquentia* between the "poet," who rejoices in the mother tongue's inherent mutability and corporeality, and the "grammarian," who fruitlessly attempts to impose upon it an artificial stability.

34. See, for example, Albert Russell Ascoli, *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Alastair J. Minnis, "Amor and Auctoritas in the Self-Commentary of Dante and Francesco da Barberino," *Poetica* 32 (1990): 25–42.

35. For an excellent survey of this midcareer (Cavalcantian) fatalism, and its relationship to Francesca's discourse in *Inferno* 5, see Teodolinda Barolini, "Dante and Cavalcanti (On Making Distinctions in Matters of Love): *Inferno* V in its Lyric Context," in *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 70–101.

36. For important discussions of the *petrose*, see, for example: Corrado Bologna, *Il ritorno di Beatrice* (Rome: Salerno, 1998); Robert M. Durling and Ronald L. Martinez, *Time and the Crystal: Studies in Dante's "Rime Petrose"* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990); Heather Webb, *The Medieval Heart* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 113–35.

37. Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert*, 162.

38. See Mazzotta: "By the theological resonance, Dante clearly implies . . . the darkening of reason by the fleshly sight of the Medusa" (*Dante, Poet of the Desert*, 163).

39. *Aen.* 4.365–67: "Nec tibi diva parens, generis nec Dardanus auctor, / perfide, sed duris genuit te cautibus horrens / Caucasus, Hyrcanaeque admorunt ubera tigres."

40. *Aen.* 6.467–71: "Talibus Aeneas ardentem et torva tumentem / lenibat dictis animum lacrimasque ciebat. Illa solo fixos oculos aversa tenebat / nec magis incepto voltum sermone movetur, / quam si dura silex aut stet Marpesia cautes."

41. *Aen.* 4.381–87: "I, sequere Italiam ventis, pete regna per undas. Spero equidem mediis, si quid pia numina possunt, supplicia hausurum scopulis et nomine Dido / saepe vocaturum. Sequar atris ignibus absens / et, cum frigida mors anima seduxerit artus, omnibus umbra locis adero. Dabis, improbe, poenas. / Audiam et haec Manis veniet mihi fama sub imos."

42. *Epist.* 3.4–5, 7: "Reddatur, ecce, sermo Calliopeus inferius, quo sententialiter canitur, quamquam transumptive more poetico signetur intentum, amorem huius posse torpescere atque denique interire, nec non huius, quod corruptio unius generatio sit alterius, in anima reformari. Et fides huius, quamquam sit ab experientia persuasum, ratione potest et auctoritate muniri. Omnis namque potentia

que post corruptionem unius actus non deperit, naturaliter reservatur in alium: ergo potentie sensitive, manente organo, per corruptionem unius actus non depereunt, et naturaliter reservantur in alium; cum igitur potentia concupiscibilis, que sedes amoris est, sit potentia sensitiva, manifestum est quod post corruptionem unius passionis qua in actum reducitur, in alium reservatur. . . . Auctoritatem vero Nasonis, quarto *De Rerum Transformatione*, que directe atque ad litteram propositum respicit, superest ut intueare; scilicet ubi tradit autor equidem in fabula trium sororum contemtricum in semine Semeles, ad Solem loquens, qui nymphis aliis derelictis atque neglectis in quas prius exarserat, noviter Leucothoen diligebat: 'Quid nunc, Yperione nate,' et reliqua." Translation from *Dantis Alagherii Epistolae: The Letters of Dante*, ed. and trans. Paget Toynbee, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966).

43. *Rime* 104, lines 9–11: "Però nel cerchio della sua palestra / libero arbitrio già mai non fu franco, / sì che consiglio invan vi si balestra."

44. The *De vulgari eloquentia* (2.2) similarly restricts the topic of love to the appetitive part of the tripartite Aristotelian soul, in contrast with the "rational" brand of love proclaimed by the *Vita Nuova* and resurrected in the *Commedia*.

45. On Dante's ideological dialogue with Cavalcanti, see, for example: Zygmunt G. Barański, "Per similitudine di abito scientifico": Dante, Cavalcanti and the Sources of Medieval 'Philosophical' Poetry," in *Literature and Science in Italian Culture From Dante to the Present Day*, ed. Pierpaolo Antonello and Simon Gilson (Oxford: Legenda, 2004), 14–52; Barolini, *Dante's Poets*, 123–53; Manuele Gragnolati, "Trasformazioni e assenze: la performance della *Vita nova* e le figure di Dante e Cavalcanti," *L'Alighieri* 35 (2010): 5–23 (also in *Dante the Lyric and Ethical Poet*, ed. Zygmunt G. Barański and Martin L. McLaughlin (Oxford: Legenda, 2010), 74–91); Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Body of Beatrice* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 69–90; Enrico Malato, *Dante e Guido Cavalcanti: il dissidio per la Vita nuova e il "disdegno" di Guido* (Rome: Salerno, 1997).

46. See Mazzotta, 161–62. Rossi notes that the same rhyme is redeployed in *Purgatorio* 11.33–35, where "Dido" is tellingly replaced by "Guido": "Dante spins out, at the level of technique, what appears to be an ongoing criticism implicating Guido in his own verses to the *Donna petrosa*. Cavalcanti's erroneous view of love as Martian occultation . . . may thus be indirectly remembered as similar to the pernicious view of Venus's influence rejected at *Par. VIII*, 1–9": Albert L. Rossi, "E pos d'amor plus no'm cal': Ovidian Exemplarity and Folco's Rhetoric of Love in *Paradiso IX*," *Tenzo: Bulletin of the Société Guilhem IX* 5 (1989): 49–102.

47. On other ways in which the pilgrim's encounter with Beatrice in the Earthly Paradise can be seen to reorient Dante's poetics and subjectivity, overcoming the diverse limitations of his writings in the previous years, see for example: Cestaro, *Dante and the Grammar of the Nursing Body*, 135–66; Francesca Southerden, "Lost for Words: Recuperating Melancholy Subjectivity in Dante's Eden," in *Dante's Plurilingualism: Authority, Knowledge, Subjectivity*, ed. Sara Fortuna, Manuele Gragnolati, and Jurgen Trabant (Oxford: Legenda, 2010), 193–210; Sara Sturm-Maddox, "The 'Rime Petrose' and the Purgatorial Palinode," *Studies in Philology* 84, no. 2 (1987): 119–33.

48. See Lino Pertile, "Does the *Stilnovo* Go to Heaven?" and F. Regina Psaki, "Love for Beatrice: Transcending Contradiction in the *Paradiso*," both in *Dante for the New Millennium*, ed. Teodolinda Barolini and H. Wayne Storey (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), 104–14 and 115–30. Pertile notes the many images of "burning" desire in the *Paradiso* in his essay "L'antica fiamma."

49. Sturm-Maddox, "The 'Rime Petrose' and the Purgatorial Palinode," esp. 130–35.

50. Marco Veglia has recently sought to highlight the continuities between the stern and inflexible Beatrice of the Earthly Paradise and the unheeding Medusa of the *petrose* sequence. These continuities prompt Veglia to opine, more controversially, that the *donna pietra* is not, in fact, a rival love but a representation of Beatrice herself *post mortem*. The journey recounted in the *Commedia* is thus enabled not simply by Dante's return to Beatrice, but by the "conversion" of the formerly unmerciful Beatrice to Dante. See Marco Veglia, "Beatrice e Medusa dalle 'petrose' alla *Commedia*," *Tenzone* 11 (2010): 123–56.

51. See Brownlee, "Dante, Beatrice, and the Two Departures," 7. The passage cited includes one of the palinodic references to the *rime petrose* highlighted by Sturm-Maddox, with the use of "dibarba" (a *hapax* in the *Commedia*) seen by the critic as correcting the lines "e 'l mio disio però non

cangia il verde, / sì è barbato ne la dura petra / che parla e sente come fosse donna" (lines 49–52), which had described the paralysis caused by Dante's erotic desire for the *donna pietra* in the *sestina* "Al poco giorno" (*Rime* 7). See Sturm-Maddox, "The 'Rime Petrose' and the Purgatorial Palinode," 131–32.

52. Hawkins, noting the Virgilian resonance of the oak simile, describes how "Virgil's stoic hero becomes a Christian pilgrim meant to be uprooted" ("Dido, Beatrice, and the Signs of Ancient Love," 122), while Brownlee, similarly, writes that "Aeneas's successful resistance to Dido's words is required by the poetics of the *Aeneid* and the figure of the *annoso valida cum robore quercus* which remains upright is thus positive. The Christian poetics of the *Commedia* require on the contrary that Dante-protagonist yield to the power of Beatrice's words: the positive figure is here the uprooted 'robusto cerro'" ("Dante, Beatrice, and the Two Departures," 9).

53. With reference to the medieval understanding of the heart as "double-gendered," combining "masculine" powers of projection and "feminine" permeability, Heather Webb has recently argued that the poet's heart is feminized over the course of the *Commedia*, "trained in proper passivity and receptivity" (134), and that the poetry of the *Commedia* fundamentally derives from an openness to external, sensual stimuli. See *The Medieval Heart*, 96–142. We might say that the *Convivio* is, by contrast, a restrictively "masculine" work, which not only closes itself to such stimuli (I refer the reader to the quotation from Ulrich Leo's essay in note 31) but situates its value—and its virility—in doing so. See Cestaro for an excellent reading of the *Commedia*'s construction of a "redeemed corporeal selfhood" (*Dante and the Grammar of the Nursing Body*, 113), which does not entail a suppression of desire and corporeality in favor of rationality (as was in the case in the classical paradigm of development privileged in the earlier *Convivio*) but an integration of the two dimensions.

54. See Daniel Gillis, *Eros and Death in the 'Aeneid'* (Rome: "L'Erma" di Bretschneider, 1983).

55. Wetherbee, *The Ancient Flame*, 5.

56. Schnapp, "Dante's Sexual Solecisms," 149. See also Brownlee, 13.

57. Hollander, for example, writes: "*Inferno* I was undoubtedly composed with *Convivio* IV very much in mind; for in *Inferno* I we find translated from *Convivio* IV not only the 'top of the arch of life,' the thirty-fifth year which should mark a man's maturity, but also the concept that the young man who has entered the 'wood of error' (*selva erronea*) of this life requires that the right path be pointed out to him by his elders (IV, XXIV). The mature guide in question, both within the drama of *Inferno* I and in Dante's own life as a poet, appears to have been Virgil." Robert Hollander, *Allegory in Dante's 'Commedia'* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 77.

# Rectification, Confession, Torture: Justice and Juridical Conventions in *Inferno* 13

LOREN VALTERZA

The question of Dante's familiarity with Roman law has long interested scholars who have noted his reverence for the ancient legal texts and his tendency to cite them in support of political arguments.<sup>1</sup> Far from producing a definitive answer, they have instead created—exhaustively and usefully—a catalogue of sightings of the Byzantine emperor Justinian (483–565 CE) and his *Corpus Iuris Civilis* (composed ca. 529–34), which sought to codify Roman law. Studies of Dante and the law thus have focused (understandably) on identifying specific places in the Dantean corpus where either Justinian or his texts are mentioned or cited and on reading Roman law as positive law in Dante's model of the cosmos. In the case of the *Divine Comedy*, however, such an approach fails to address how Dante's narration of damned and saved souls specifically relies upon judicial theory and procedure. This essay seeks to explore this fundamental question in light of three critical legal conventions dear to Dante: confession, torture, and *infamia*. Each of these conventions enjoyed an elevated status as a key procedure for ascertaining the guilt or innocence of the accused in a court of law. Each also played a conspicuous, even central, role in Dante's portrayal of the guilty and punished souls the pilgrim encounters in Hell. Their presence in Dante's narrative infuses it with an institutional validity guaranteed by their central place in that most formal of all medieval processes for determining the truth—the legal trial.

*Inferno* 13 features all three of these conventions and therefore allows us to see how Dante saw the relationship among these legal categories'. Ostensibly concerned with portraying the punishment of the suicides,

Canto 13 also takes up the question of justice both through its structure and the course of events it relates. The majority of the canto is taken up by Pier delle Vigne, whose exchange with the pilgrim and Virgil is book-ended by two acts of rectificatory justice: two injurious acts balanced by two acts of reparation that restore the equity lost in the exchange. To achieve this equilibrium, Dante dramatizes Aristotle's concept of justice while simultaneously adapting key procedural devices approved by the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century courts of law. By the end of the encounter with Pier, Dante has made clear that the suicide has received the justice he was denied in life—Pier's *infamia* being lifted by the pilgrim's fulfillment of his promise to convey the fallen *logothete's* self-defense to the world of the living.

### A Just Canto

In Canto 13 of the *Inferno*, we are on the edge of the second subcircle, about to enter the place of those souls who have turned violent against themselves. Virgil tells the pilgrim that he must observe for himself this place, because it is so fantastic that he would never believe Virgil's description of it without witnessing it firsthand. The pilgrim looks about and hears terrible cries but sees no one, and so Virgil instructs him to break off a little twig from any one of the branches. When the pilgrim does so, the broken stem cries out, asking why he has split him. The branch bleeds and continues to rebuke the pilgrim, who seems afraid and drops the twig. Virgil intervenes and takes responsibility, explaining that his charge would not have believed him if he had not witnessed the tree's bleeding for himself. Virgil then offers a sort of amends: he tells the bleeding tree that the pilgrim will help rehabilitate his fame in the living world in exchange for learning the soul's identity. The tree accepts and identifies itself not by name, but by describing its relationship with the emperor Frederick II, making clear that this is Pier delle Vigne (Petrus de Vineis).

Dante deftly creates the tension between Pier's professed innocence of the political accusations he faced in life and the spectacular punishment incurred by the violation of natural and divine law resulting from his suicide.<sup>2</sup> Pier's suicide, though itself a sinful transgression, is portrayed as his reaction to unjust charges,<sup>3</sup> and this dense dramatic irony underwrites his role in the *Commedia*. Beyond this noted tension, however, questions

of justice deeply influence the narrative structure of Canto 13 since the actions of its principal characters model Aristotelian rectificatory justice.

Aristotle outlines two distinct species of justice in the fifth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*: distributive and rectificatory.<sup>4</sup> The first has to do with making sure that each person is given his or her due when apportioning any type of goods or reputation. The second is concerned with rectifying the injustice caused by an injury inflicted by another party. For Aristotle, the virtue of justice differs from all others because it is not a median existing on a plane of degrees between two extreme states of being. One cannot be too little just or too much so; one is either just or not. Characterized as the propensity to perform just acts, justice is therefore measured in the *Ethics* by the actions of one person toward another. It is thus *the* social virtue, inherently dramatic in so far as it requires the presence of more than one person and some sort of exchange to take place.<sup>5</sup> In both of its incarnations as distributive and rectificatory, justice instead is a virtue manifested primarily in *actions*, not states of being:

Justice is a mean, not as the other virtues are, but because it is about an intermediate condition, whereas injustice is about extremes. Justice is the virtue in accord with which the just person is said to do what is just in accord with his decision, distributing good things and bad, both between himself and others and between others. (NE 5.1134a1–4)

These statements propel a reader to an inevitable conclusion: that justice's singularity rests in the fact that it is manifested not merely in the disposition of a single person but in actions *between* two or more people. That is, it exists primarily in a social setting,<sup>6</sup> making it particularly suited to theatrical representations. Canto 13 exploits rectificatory justice when Virgil has the pilgrim break off one of Pier's branches only to offer him a compensatory award. Put simply, seeing how justice operates in Canto 13 means understanding it in Aristotelian terms—in the just *actions* of the pilgrim and his guide and in the unjust past actions of the damned souls.

Justice in action requires actors, and Canto 13 establishes clearly and immediately the participants. In keeping with Aristotle's analysis of justice in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Dante presents Virgil as the protagonist of Canto 13, thereby sharply reducing the pilgrim's role and leaving it stripped almost entirely of agency. Agency matters here since Aristotle decreed that motivation is critical for determining whether the person acting is just or unjust:



Again, when a man in violation of the law harms another (otherwise than in retaliation) voluntarily, he acts unjustly, and a voluntary agent is one who knows both the person he is affecting by his action and the instrument he is using. . . . (NE 5.1138a.11.5)

Dante carefully constructs the scene with Pier to show the pilgrim acting in ignorance of and Virgil in full awareness of the consequences of their actions. As he explains after the fact, Virgil intentionally lures the pilgrim into wounding Pier, knowing full well that the soul within the tree would be harmed by the action, thus indisputably making his actions unjust:

ma la cosa incredibile mi fece  
indurlo ad ovra ch'a me stesso pesa.  
"Ma dilli chi tu fosti, sì che 'n vece  
d'alcun' ammenda tua fama rinfreschi  
nel mondo sù, dove tornar li lece."  
(*Inf.* 13.50–54)

Canto 13 carefully allocates culpability for this act to Virgil alone. This is, in effect, Virgil's canto: unambiguously responsible for the course of events about to take place, he is also responsible for making amends to Pier, the injured party. (Indeed, the exchange with Pier delle Vigne is almost entirely between him and Virgil, the pilgrim not speaking at all until verse 82, and then only in a single tercet in which he abdicates agency by asking Virgil to continue speaking on his behalf.)<sup>7</sup>

Predicating the pilgrim's action on the instructions of his master effectively transfers liability to Virgil. Since the pilgrim cannot foresee the result of his action, he cannot be responsible for the injustice committed. In fact, even before pruning Pier, Dante the narrator stresses the pilgrim's lack of understanding of the situation by deploying a curious and uncharacteristic subjunctive construction:

Cred' iò ch'ei credette ch'io credesse  
che tante voci uscisser, tra quei tronchi,  
da gente che per noi si nascondesse.  
(*Inf.* 13.25–27)

The pilgrim's guess about what Virgil is thinking downplays the possibility of his complicity in the injurious act that his guide is about to coax him into inflicting on Pier. Commenting on the rhetoric of this tercet, scholars have construed its tangled language as mimetic—either of the

vines in the grove of suicides or of the pilgrim's own convoluted thinking as he tries to comprehend the place.<sup>8</sup> More remarkable, for my purposes, is the effort taken in these lines to represent the gulf between the pilgrim's understanding and that of Virgil, especially since elsewhere in the *Inferno* Dante takes great pains to demonstrate how in tandem is the thinking of the two (*Inf.* 23.25–30). Such a reading accommodates other explanations while adding a fundamental component for interpretation, namely, the effect of this tercet on the agency of the characters in the scene. In my view, the uncertainty between the pilgrim and his guide transforms the canto's narrative by redefining their individual responsibility—or lack thereof—for their actions in it. As a result of his actions, Virgil must take responsibility for the wound after Pier cries out. Dante, as the author of the work, is offering us a concise breakdown of the scene, its actors, and their motives. Thus “Cred’ io” casts further doubt on the agency of the pilgrim through the narrator's use of the subjunctive.<sup>9</sup>

Returning to the Peripatetic theme of the canto's structure, we see that the wound itself has become the loss in an exchange. By Dante's Aristotelian logic, Virgil thus now owes Pier compensation; as a way of restoring the balance, the Roman poet offers the injured soul restored worldly *fama* via the living pilgrim:

“ma la cosa incredibile mi fece  
indurlo ad ovra ch’a me stesso pesa.  
Ma dilli chi tu fosti, sì ch ’n vece  
d’alcun’ ammenda tua fama rinfreschi  
nel mondo sù, dove tornar li lece.”  
(*Inf.* 13.50–54)

For either medieval or modern readers, that Virgil might owe Pier these amends is at best a curious supposition. After all, both are damned souls beyond atonement or recompense. Even if we ignore the fact of their damnation, their relative culpability would render the question of amends either irrelevant or too complex for contemplation since, by Virgil's own explanation, those further down in the infernal hierarchy have caused even more offense to heaven (*Inf.* 11.22–27). (Surely, in this cosmological pecking order, Virgil, as a virtuous heathen, would be among the least culpable in the *Inferno*.)

Yet Dante's depiction in Canto 13 rejects such considerations and instead insists on an Aristotelian definition of rectificatory justice. The

poet does so in part because—as the Philosopher writes in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, a work specifically cited by Virgil as authoritative when understanding the logic of Hell’s geography (*Inf.* 11.80–88)—the type of justice here being explored (rectification) concerns itself only with the nature of the injury and treats both parties as equals:

Here it does not matter whether the good man steals from the wicked man or the wicked from the good, whether the good or wicked man commits adultery. But the law looks at only the nature of the damage done, and treats parties as equals, if indeed one does an injustice and the other suffers an injustice, if this one injures and that one is injured. Therefore, the judge attempts to reduce to equality the unjust thing which has an inequality. (*NE* 5, 1131b32–1132a7)

Amends must be made between Pier and Virgil, in other words, because their identities do not matter. Where a wrong has been committed and a wound inflicted, it falls to the one responsible to make it right.

And turning to the outcome of Virgil’s offer to Pier, we see that it has produced beneficial results for both parties. In spite of the context of damnation, Dante’s reliance on the Aristotelian concept of justice as equity ensures that the encounter with Pier delle Vigne resolve itself as structurally balanced according to a specifically legal logic. Virgil has coaxed him into identifying himself, while Pier has used the wound to communicate with the pilgrim and clear his name of the political charges that lead to his downfall. His confession and protestation of his innocence in turn follow the pilgrim back to the living. In the economy of the poem, Pier has the final word in the dispute over the charges leveled at him in life since the account has been recorded in Dante’s text and we as living readers have heard his story.

But the encounter does not conclude there. The arrival of two souls fleeing a pack of wild dogs abruptly ends the encounter with Pier. The first, immediately identified after as Jacopo da San Andrea, seeks to hide behind the bush of another suicide but fails. The dogs pounce upon him, rending both his limbs and those of the bush, and carry Jacopo off into the darkness. The wounded bush cries out in language again heavily colored by terms of Aristotelian justice:

“O Iacopo,” dicea, “da Santo Andrea,  
che t’è giovato di me fare schermo?  
che colpa ho io de la tua vita rea?”  
(*Inf.* 13.133–35)

The injured soul speaks about justice and the wound done to him in the same terms of profit and loss that governed Virgil's earlier exchange with Pier. That is, Dante figures his wounds as the loss in the exchange, just as he had Pier's after the pilgrim maimed him. This time, however, neither the pilgrim nor his guide is culpable, and neither steps forward to take responsibility. Instead, though not involved in the altercation, the pilgrim solemnly gathers up the broken limbs and puts them back near the bush in the first line of the next canto,

Poi che la carità del natio loco  
mi strinse, raunai le fronde sparte  
e rende'le a colui, ch'era già fioco.  
(*Inf.* 14.1–3)

Though not responsible for the wound, the pilgrim follows his guide's lead and redresses the injury to his countryman as best he can. What therefore begins as a seeming interruption of the earlier encounter with Pier instead structurally confirms the terms by which it has meted out justice. The canto thus closes with a second wrong righted, one duplicating the terms of the first act of justice while lending to it a formal symmetry and balance palpably Aristotelian and distinctly legal.

### **A Just Confession**

Oral confessions made by the souls of the *Inferno* constitute one of Dante's key literary devices, and a good portion of the text consists of his use of this convention.<sup>10</sup> The most frequent sequence of actions has the pilgrim ask Virgil to identify a soul. Virgil then replies that the pilgrim must hear the soul speak for itself, and this exchange is followed by a conversation in which the soul confesses its sins (and usually its identity).<sup>11</sup> While the vast majority of these interactions—with Francesca da Rimini, Nicholas III, and Vanni Fucci, to name a few—proceed along these or similar lines, the encounter with Pier delle Vigne in the Grove of Suicides represents a particularly dramatic departure from this usual way of proceeding. There, Virgil and the pilgrim must resort to physical violence to discover a soul's identity, the act of violence enabling speech. In setting up Canto 13's scenes in this way, Dante appropriates both the authority of a judge presiding over the confession of the accused and the powers of a judicial

inquisitor, that figure in medieval jurisprudence possessing state sanctioned means for extracting confessions.

In an age when confession was considered the ultimate possible proof (commonly known as the “Queen of Proofs”) in a trial, Pier’s confession of suicide acquires newfound resonance in Canto 13’s dramatization of judicial procedure and truth.<sup>12</sup> Recreating this most reliable of proofs for his encounter, Dante also appropriates its unassailable authority, its power to distinguish acknowledged guilt from denied allegation. While he employs this technique many times throughout the *Inferno*, the encounter with Pier is distinctive—in part because Pier’s confession of guilt is intertwined with a plea of innocence and in part because Pier’s confession of suicide extends legitimacy to his cries for exoneration of the political charges against him.

Medieval confession and torture were highly regulated and prominent in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century culture. Beyond the full proof attained through confession, medieval jurists had at their disposal a sophisticated hierarchy of circumstantial evidence known as *indicia*, which were organized according to the weight of certainty they offered in a trial. The judge tallied up the various *indicia* he deemed valid and conducted a trial accordingly. Despite the multitude of forms this evidence could take, only two specific *indicia*—either a full confession or the testimony of two eyewitnesses—could serve as proof of a defendant’s guilt. Lower *indicia* (such as the discovery of a murder weapon in the possession of the accused) could only implicate a suspect; no amount of lower *indicia*, no matter how compelling, could sustain a verdict of guilty. Thus the confession or testimony of two eyewitnesses to the crime might constitute a full proof; by themselves the lower *indicia* could at most constitute a half proof. In this system then the presence of a substantial amount of lower *indicia* against a defendant would lead to an impasse: though conviction was not possible, neither could the defendant be allowed<sup>13</sup> to go free given the strong probability of guilt.<sup>14</sup>

There was also a further complication. Of the two full *indicia*, only confession proved consistently reliable in practice due to the unlikelihood of finding two eyewitnesses to a crime.<sup>15</sup> Whereas witnesses had to be present at the moment the crime was committed, a suspect could make a confession at any time afterward. As a simple question of practicality and procedure, jurists and judges relied most frequently on the confession of the accused to obtain a conviction.

Prizing the confession in a judicial trial had always been a tendency in Western law, but it became much more pronounced beginning in the thirteenth century. Despite its critical importance to criminal procedure, reliance on confession was not a juridical innovation; rather, it had spread to the courts from the religious sphere.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the church had already laid the groundwork by making sacramental confession the focus of Christian faith. As a result, the act of confessing quickly assumed importance in other social arenas, including jurisprudence. Writing in the first decades of the fourteenth century, Dante was working with concepts very familiar to his readers when he made confession one of the chief narrative devices of the *Commedia*.

Given the sacramental origins of confession, it is remarkable that Dante treats it primarily as a juridical proceeding. Unlike its sacramental counterpart, confession in the *Inferno* cannot lead to absolution. Dante first portrays it as the souls' final act before being sentenced by Minos, fashioning for it a critical place in the structure of Dante's poem since it serves as the basis for the punishment of the souls sent there.<sup>17</sup> Throughout the canticle, Dante evokes the process by which the damned receive their sentence as a result of their confession to Minos upon their arrival in Hell.<sup>18</sup> As soon as a soul has finished confessing its sins, Minos wraps his tail around himself the number of times that correspond to the number of the circle to which the soul will be sent. In Dante's conception of damnation, even though divine justice condemns them, all souls must still articulate their sins in their own words before they can be properly admitted to Hell.<sup>19</sup> Judicial confession is thus ingrained deeply into the narrative and enjoys the utmost legitimacy and authority.

Beyond the souls' encounter with Minos, confession remains at the forefront of many of the portrayals of the damned throughout the *Inferno*. With the notable exception of Bocca degli Abati in Canto 32, all souls addressed by the pilgrim must confess their sins to him or to Virgil.<sup>20</sup> Dante emphasizes the souls' inability to refuse to confess in particularly dramatic fashion through the encounter with Vanni Fucci in Canto 24, among the thieves. When the pilgrim asks him to articulate his sins, Fucci cannot stop himself from answering the question honestly:

poi disse: "Più mi duol che tu m'hai colto  
ne la miseria dove tu mi vedi,  
che quando fui de l'altra vita tolto.

Io non posso negar quel che tu chiedi;  
in giù son messo tanto perch' io fui  
ladro a la sagrestia d'i belli arredi,  
e falsamente già fu apposto altrui.  
(*Inf.* 24.133–39)

Fucci confesses his guilt not only to the pilgrim but to the world—an act doubly significant since, during his own life, he had allowed another person to be convicted of a crime for which he was later found guilty. The scene's poignancy arises from the certainty that Dante assigns to Fucci's culpability, a certainty derived from the confession made by Fucci himself.

Thus when Pier confesses his suicide, he does so under the veil of the most absolute legal authority possible in Dante's time. His confession, moreover, is double-edged and removes all doubt about his guilt, allowing him to protest his political innocence in equally absolute terms. Here Dante is engaged in the same sort of endeavor as the jurists—the search for certitude in determining the guilt or innocence of the accused. It is not surprising then that he should turn to the tools of jurisprudence—in this case confession—when narrating his tale.

### **Regulated Torture**

However regretful Virgil feels for having persuaded the pilgrim to mutilate Pier, his act of violence remains the means by which the suicide is made to tell his story. In fact, the link between injury and the production of speech becomes explicit when Pier tells the pilgrim and Virgil that it is via the wounds inflicted by the harpies feeding on the trees that the souls within are provided the means to express their pain:

Surge in vermena e in pianta silvestra:  
l'Arpie, pascendo poi de le sue foglie,  
fanno dolore, e al dolor fenestra.  
(*Inf.* 13.100–102)

Yet the pilgrim's harming of Pier does more than allow the soul to speak its pain; it also elicits a specifically judicial truth since the breaking of the twig leads to Pier at once confessing his sin and making an oath to defend his good name. The interchange is striking at once for its dramatic tension

and its cultural resonance; for in structuring the scene this way Dante reproduces the dynamics behind the medieval practice of juridical torture.

Torture in the early fourteenth century had a specific role to play in a legal trial as a means to elicit a confession. When all other means for determining the guilt of an accused had been exhausted, torture became the last resort. It sought to gain access to the undisputed truth via the accused's own words. The portrayal of Pier's injuries appropriates the function of torture, but with key differences. A central tenet of judicial torture in the Middle Ages, for example, was that it could only be used *during* a trial and only as a means of eliciting a confession from a suspect. Torture, in other words, was not a punishment.<sup>21</sup> Strictly speaking, a person already condemned could not be "tortured" (unless, of course, undergoing trial for a different crime). That is, one could injure the guilty after a trial, but, stripped of its investigative function, such an attack would then be more properly classified as "assault" rather than "torture." Pier's presence in Hell is predicated on his having committed the sin of suicide. As we shall see, however, his culpable status in the *Inferno* is uniquely multifaceted, since it is through the use of violence and the inflicting of injuries that both Dante the author and pilgrim investigate the question of Pier's guilt and ultimately exonerate him of the political charges that he faced at the end of his life.

The rise of torture in the thirteenth century was closely tied with the needs of the increasingly inquisitorial criminal process and the diffusion of Roman law.<sup>22</sup> A series of factors contributed to the courts' increasing dependence on torture as a method of obtaining ironclad convictions of the accused. While jurists had long been familiar with torture because of its presence in the *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, it was only with the decline of the judicial ordeal in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that they turned to torture as a part of criminal procedure.<sup>23</sup> Following its reintroduction in 1228 in the *Liber Iuris Urbis Veronae*, torture enjoyed an increased legitimacy due to its inclusion in Roman law. The Roman jurist Ulpian (ca. 170–223 CE) said of it:

By *quaestio* [torture] we are to understand the torment and suffering of the body in order to elicit the truth. Neither interrogation by itself, nor lightly inspired fear correctly pertains to this edict. Since, therefore, *quaestio* is to be understood as force and torment. These are the things that determine its meaning. (*Digest* 47.10.15.41)



The thirteenth-century glossator Azo defined torture as “the inquiry after truth by means of torment.”<sup>24</sup>

Returning to Canto 13, we find torture and confession occupying critical positions in the encounter with Pier delle Vigne. On receiving his wound, Pier admits his suicide, portraying it as an unjust act and recounting the events that led to it with elegant rhetoric. Injury and language appear in tandem throughout the short episode, the first occasion occurring immediately after the pilgrim inflicts the initial wound,

Allor porsi la mano un poco avante  
e colsi un ramiciel da un gran pruno;  
e 'l tronco suo gridò: “Perché mi schiante?”

Da che fatto fu poi di sangue bruno.  
ricominciò a dir: “Perché mi scerpi?”  
non hai tu spirito di pietade alcuno?

(*Inf.* 13.31–36)

Pier's speech and blood are explicitly linked no fewer than three times,<sup>25</sup> forging an inescapable association between injury and the production of language. This detail becomes all the more significant when one remembers that a broken twig doesn't often produce any noticeable liquid at all. The presence of the blood<sup>26</sup> then necessarily casts the tree *as a body* that must be made to speak, where the pilgrim's unintentionally violent act creates a wound that literally *serves as a mouth*, inviting Pier to speak and giving him reason to do so.

### ***Fama and infamia, or Pier's Exculpation***

Scholars have long been unable to agree on whether Dante portrays Pier delle Vigne as innocent or guilty of the charges that lead to his fall from grace.<sup>27</sup> Modern commentators tend to believe in his innocence and that the pity the pilgrim shows to Pier intentionally contrasts with the gravity of the latter's mortal sin of suicide, thereby creating the tension in the canto. But the episode takes on deeper significance when we read Pier's self-defense in the context of the medieval doctrine of *infamia*, and it is through the lens of this central concept of Roman law that I would like to conclude this essay.

In the negotiations that follow Pier's torture and precede his confession, Virgil offers amends to Pier for his injury by allowing him to

“refresh” his *fama* in the “world above.” While this can be taken to mean that Virgil is offering to *renew* Pier’s fame, it also has the second meaning of *restoring* his reputation. Indeed, when Pier accepts this offer, he does much more than simply inform the pilgrim of his identity; he prays that the pilgrim might return to the world of the living to clear his name of the charge of treason for which he had been condemned. In this case, *fama* means both “fame” and “sound reputation.” Via Pier’s concern for his reputation, Dante introduces to us the terms and procedures of trials, where the reputations of accused and accuser were essential to the proceedings.

Far beyond a simple question of reputation, one’s *fama* formed the basis of one’s status in medieval society. *Fama*, like honor, required constant renewal, being based upon what others in the community thought of the individual.<sup>28</sup> Public acts—such as marriage, success at physical and legal competitions, or political triumphs—all added to one’s reputation, and therefore standing, in the community. Individuals were highly conscious of their *fama*: to lose too much of it meant to risk facing the institutionalized shame known as *infamia*, which in Roman law brought with it severe social and legal disabilities.<sup>29</sup> A stigma of *infamia*, for instance, rendered the *infamis* unable to make an oath, vow, or contract. Such a person could neither lend nor borrow money, nor become an official in the administration of state. Where vassalage and oaths dominated the making of contracts, *infamia* constituted a severe handicap, to say the least. Pier’s concern in Canto 13 thus goes far beyond simply having the pilgrim “refresh” his name; he really wishes it fully restored it to its previous good standing.

Beyond the fundamental question of status, *fama* also constituted a fundamental component of judicial procedure. The first stage in a civil or criminal trial was the *inquisitio famae*—a formal examination of the characters of accuser, accused, and witnesses—the results of which determined the course of the trial. Any person deemed an *infamis* was at a severe disadvantage in court being denied the right to call a witness, testify, or postulate. To make certain that witnesses understood the concept, a judge most frequently asked community members simply, “*Quid est fama?*” Thus we should not be surprised when, in *Inferno* 13, Pier delle Vigne introduces himself not by name but by means of his station and reputation, as *logothete* to Frederick II, a position of almost unparalleled prestige and power. Nor should we be surprised when, after this introduction, he moves first to the charges made against him, the disgrace of his removal

from office, and his imprisonment. Mimicking the procedural order of a medieval trial, Pier addresses these considerations of *fama* and *infamia* first since they will affect how the rest of his testimony is taken. Only then does he move to describing his suicide, doing so in circumscribed fashion.

The circumstances of Pier's political and legal troubles qualify as the origin of his *infamia*. No one could be born with *infamia*, but one could acquire it as a result of legal procedures, in several ways. Certain crimes carried *infamia* as a statutory consequence (*infamia ipso iure*, for instance). A person found guilty of one or more crimes could receive *infamia* as part of a sentence. In addition, even in those cases where *infamia* was not specifically listed as the penalty for a crime, a judge of his own volition could decide to issue it as a sentence upon conviction (*per sententiam*). One could even incur *infamia* after conviction by suffering a disgraceful punishment, such as public whipping (*ex genere pene*).<sup>30</sup> At the very least, the severity of the accusations that caused Pier's spectacular fall and brutal punishment qualified him for *infamia ex genere pene*, a burden heavy enough even in death that he eagerly accepts Virgil's offer to ease it.

The details of Pier's downfall were so well known that Dante could and did rely on the notoriety of his demise sixty years after the fact, choosing not even to mention Pier by name. For we who read the *Inferno* more than seven centuries after its composition, however, a brief synopsis of the life of the historical Pier delle Vigne is probably in order.<sup>31</sup> The arc of Pier's professional and personal life was extraordinarily dramatic and is strikingly remarkable for an era when rapid upward social mobility was virtually unknown. Born in Capua around 1190, Pier spent the early part of his life in circumstances starkly different from those of his later life. Early documents show him living humbly, obtaining financial assistance from the university or the commune in the form of a small stipend.<sup>32</sup>

Law and letters proved a means of his escaping poverty. The young jurist's entry into politics came via Archbishop Berardo of Palermo, a personal friend of Frederick II, who introduced him to the emperor at Pier's request. The two men enjoyed a friendly relationship, sharing cultural and intellectual interests. Indeed, rarely have two historical figures been so closely associated with each another.<sup>33</sup> As a result, Pier rose rapidly within the imperial political structure, becoming high court judge (*judex magnae curiae*) in 1225. He moved ever closer to Frederick by becoming his *familiaris*, or privy counselor, a position he held between 1238 and 1247. In May 1247 Pier reached the zenith of his impressive career,

becoming pronotary of the imperial court and *logothete* of the Kingdom of Sicily and thus one of the most powerful men in Europe. This made him the emperor's spokesman in all matters legal, diplomatic, social, and political. He also became the director of finances for the whole of the empire. In short, he became the primary link between Frederick and his subjects. An office created specifically for him, the position of *logothete* imbued Pier with unheard of power and influence in the empire.<sup>34</sup> Pier then fell from this professional acme two years after his final promotion when he was arrested, blinded, and thrown into prison at San Miniato or Pisa (accounts vary). The specific charges behind Pier's arrest, never made public, are unlikely ever to be known,<sup>35</sup> and his imprisonment was a subject of energetic speculation by his contemporaries.<sup>36</sup> Even the precise cause of his death remains unclear: shortly after his imprisonment (around April 1249), Pier killed himself either by dashing his brains out against a wall or by flinging himself from a window.<sup>37</sup>

Pier's manner of self-presentation in the *Inferno* is interesting for its nuance, particularly since he does not hide the unjust nature of his final act. Still, his mind focuses on repairing the damage done to his reputation by what he claims are false charges:

“E se di voi alcun nel mondo riede,  
conforti la memoria mia, che giace  
ancor del colpo che 'nvidia le diede.”

(*Inf.* 13.76–78)

Here, he is chiefly concerned *not* with forgiveness for the mortal sin of taking his own life but rather with restoring his damaged political reputation. Attempting to clear his name of this *infamia*, Pier interjects that he was innocent of the political charges leveled against him in life. According to Pier's own account to the pilgrim and Virgil, his downfall came as the result of the sort of political intrigue common at every imperial court. A victim of his own success, at least in his own perception, he maintains that envy motivated the other courtiers to turn Frederick against him:

La meretrice che mai da l'ospizio  
di Cesare non torse gli occhi putti,  
morte comune, de le corti vizio,  
infiammò contra me li animi tutti;  
e li 'nfiammati infiammar sì Augusto,  
che ' lieti onor tornaro in tristi lutti.

(*Inf.* 13.64–69)

Pier's insistence on his own innocence adopts explicitly legal terms by making use of the oath, a fixture so central to trials in Dante's time that many legal historians have called it the "cornerstone of the medieval judicial procedure."<sup>38</sup> Either written in the form of charters or recorded as oral testimony, the oath constituted the strongest evidence an accuser or an accused could present—evidence entirely dependent on one's not being deemed an *infamis*.<sup>39</sup> In the passage above, Pier's solemn protestation of his own innocence thus is doubly significant, as it expresses Pier's certainty of his own innocence even as he urges the pilgrim to restore him to his rightful social status in the world above. Pier *swears* to Virgil and the pilgrim that he never betrayed his emperor:

Per le nove radici d'esto legno  
vi giuro che già mai non ruppi fede  
al mio signor, che fu d'onor sì degno.  
(*Inf.* 13.73–75)

In a strictly legal sense, what is most remarkable about this passage is that it happens at all, since, as an *infamis* Pier is barred from swearing oaths in the first place. Together with his protestations of innocence, the passage becomes even more suggestive since Dante's decision to use oral testimony or oath implicitly treats Pier as having a restored *fama*. Formerly a disgraced *ex-logothete* cast out of office by political accusations, Pier now behaves like a man whose reputation should be intact, and the canto thus enacts the restoration of his *fama*, a process that will be completed upon the pilgrim's return to the world.

*Inferno* 13 thus constitutes a key locus in Dante's poem, one in which a multitude of legal conventions intersect in the narrative to create a scene that simulates the procedure of a legal trial. It is no accident that they organize themselves around one of the most complex questions of guilt in the entire *Commedia*, that of Pier delle Vigne. Unlike most other encounters with the inhabitants of Hell, this one addresses a pair of transgressions—Pier's alleged betrayal of Frederick and his subsequent suicide—that effectively give him a dual status. On the one hand, Pier is damned for his suicide; on the other hand, he is determined not to suffer unjustly the shame for a betrayal that he did not commit. The dialogue between Virgil and the fallen *logothete* constitutes a rare moment in which one of the damned souls can insist solemnly on his own innocence rather than offer a misguided defense of the transgression that landed him in

Hell. The contrast is one that Dante exploits to masterful effect by giving Pier, as it were, the trial he never had in life.

*Rutgers University*  
*New Brunswick, New Jersey*

## NOTES

1. See especially Edward Peters, "The Frowning Pages: Scythians, Garamantes, Florentines and the Two Laws," in *The "Divine Comedy" and the Encyclopedia of Arts and Sciences*, ed. Giuseppe Di Scipio and Aldo Scaglione (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1988), 285–314, which details how Dante's conceptualization of Roman law influenced his political model. Richard Kay provides an exhaustive and powerful summary of the numerous citations of the *Digest* included in the *Convivio*. See Kay, "Roman Law in Dante's *Monarchia*," in *Law in Mediaeval Life and Thought*, ed. Edward B. King and Susan J. Ridyard (Sewanee, Tenn.: Press of the University of the South, 1990), 268.

2. Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, vol. 1, *Inferno*, ed. Ronald Martinez & Robert Durling (Oxford University Press, 1996), 213.

3. Giorgio Petrocchi, "Canto XIII: The Violent against Themselves," in *Lectura Dantis: Inferno* (Berkeley, Cal.: University of California Press, 1998), 181.

4. NE 5, 1131a10–1132b20.

5. Patrick Boyde, *Human Vices and Human Worth in Dante's Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 202–203.

6. *Ibid.*, 202.

7. Giorgio Petrocchi, "Canto XIII: The Violent against Themselves," 179.

8. Anthony K. Cassell, *Dante's Fearful Art of Justice* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1984), 32; Leo Spitzer, "Speech and Language in *Inferno* XIII," *Italica* 19 (1942): 98.

9. The narrator is, we must remember, acting fundamentally as the pilgrim, though at a point in time after the conclusion of the actions of the poem being here recounted.

10. Matthew Senior, *In the Grip of Minos: Confessional Discourse in Dante: Corneille and Racine* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1994), 49.

11. *Ibid.*, 59.

12. Edward Peters, *Torture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1996), 41.

13. Both men and women were subjected to this judicial process in the Middle Ages. Carol Lansing analyzes a fascinating case from thirteenth-century Bologna in which a love triangle consisting of a Bolognese husband and wife and an Englishman ended up in court. Among the matters to be resolved was whether or not the wife was to be regarded during the trial as an upright citizen or a prostitute, as this would determine the soundness of her testimony. See "Concubines, Lovers, and Prostitutes: Infamy and Female Identity in Medieval Bologna," in *Beyond Florence: The Contours of Medieval and Early Modern Italy*, ed. Paula Findlen et al. (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2002), 85–100.

14. Before the rise of torture in the early thirteenth century, the only way to resolve such uncertainty was to look to God for justice through the use of the juridical ordeal, the results of which were considered to be His verdict. Jurists lost the use of the ordeal when it was outlawed by the church at the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215; it quickly fell out of use everywhere the church exercised its authority. See Robert Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water: the Medieval Judicial Ordeal* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 100.

15. Peters, *Torture*, 46.

16. Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water*, 79.

17. Senior, *In the Grip of Minos*, 48.
18. *Inf.* 5.4–12; *Inf.* 13.96; *Inf.* 20.36; *Inf.* 27.124–129; *Inf.* 29.120.
19. Senior, *In the Grip of Minos*, 49.
20. *Ibid.*, 59.
21. John H. Langbein, *Torture and the Law of Proof: Europe and England in the Ancien Regime* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 3.
22. Peters, *Torture*, 41.
23. Torture undoubtedly filled the gap left by the ordeal, and the two shared many similarities. Like the ordeal, torture was only implemented as a last resort, a technique to which the court could turn when the *indicia* cast suspicion on the accused in the absence of the required two eyewitnesses. Both were especially useful in cases where witnesses were unlikely to be produced due to the clandestine nature of a crime, such as heresy and adultery.
24. Azo, *Summa Codicis (De quaestionibus)* (n.1), cited in Peters, *Torture*, 48.
25. *Inf.* 13.31–36; *Inf.* 13.40–45; *Inf.* 13.100–102.
26. Dante does not create the scene *ex novo* but instead reproduces key elements of *Aen.* 3.22–48, including the speaking and bleeding plants; nevertheless, it is still his choice to recreate these aspects of Virgil's scene, emphasizing and deemphasizing those details that serve his narrative.
27. Anthony Cassell, for example, argues that Dante was familiar with the details of Pier's embezzling (*Dante's Fearful Art of Justice*, 43). Robert Hollander, however, maintains that it is far from clear whether or not Dante had access to such information. See Hollander, *Dante Alighieri: Inferno* (New York: Anchor Books, 2002), 252 n. 64.
28. Thelma S. Fenster and Daniel Lord Smail, *Fama: the Politics of Talk and Reputation in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003), 4.
29. For the definitions of *fama* and *infamia*, I am indebted to Edward Peters, "Wounded Names: the Medieval Doctrine of Infamy," in Edward B. King, *Law in Mediaeval Life and Thought* (Sewanee, Tenn.: Press of the University of the South, 1990), 43–89.
30. Peters, "Wounded Names," 63.
31. The Borders Classics prose translation of the *Divine Comedy* (2006) even goes so far as to insert a line—not in the original text—in which Pier introduces himself by name, for the benefit of the modern reader. Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Borders Classics, 2006), 38.
32. Cassell, *Dante's Fearful Art of Justice*, 38.
33. T.C. Van Cleve, *The Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen: Immulator Mundi* (Oxford University Press, 1972), 520.
34. *Ibid.*, 520.
35. *Ibid.*, 521.
36. One theory held that he was suspected of having intrigued with the pope; some even suspected that he had tried to poison Frederick (Van Cleve, *The Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen*, 522). Giovanni Villani subscribed to the common belief that Pier was innocent and had been the victim of envy and political intrigue at Frederic's court. See *Selections from the First Nine Books of the Croniche Fiorentine of Giovanni Villani*, trans. Rose E. Selfe (London: Archibald Constable, 1906), 133.
37. Paget Toynbee, *Dante Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898), 30; Giorgio Petrocchi, "Canto XIII: The Violent against Themselves," 181.
38. Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water*, 30.
39. This type of testimony enjoys a privileged place in Italian studies because it is through the recorded statement of a witness that we have one of the earliest examples of Italian as distinct from Latin. Known as the *Placitum of Capua*, it is a legal document regarding a dispute in court over ownership of land near Monte Cassino in 960 CE (Bruno Migliorini, *Storia della lingua italiana* [Milan: Tascabili Bompiani, 2002], 90–93). Most of the document is in Latin, but the verbal testimony of one witness is preserved in the vulgar: "Sao ko kelle terre, per kelle fini que ki contene, trenta anni le possette parte sancti Benedicti." The verbal accuracy of the testimony was so critical to the trial that the judge taking the oath could not allow it to be translated into Latin for the official record, and thus had the statement in vernacular recorded as the witness made it. Such testimony was critical for both property disputes and criminal charges.

## *Incipit vita nova*★

ALBERTO CASADEI

**T**he question of the meaning of the title of Dante's early *libello* has a long history among critics, but despite the specific arguments advanced by the most recent editor and commentator of the text, Guglielmo Gorni, the issue does not seem definitively resolved. Gorni first supported the interpretation of 'vita nova' as 'a life renewed by love,' and later as 'juvenile life,' justifying his choices on the basis of a philological assessment, in particular on the specific value of that syntagma in *Purg.* 30.115–7:

questi fu tal ne la sua vita nova  
virtüalmente, ch'ogne abito destro  
fatto averebbe in lui mirabil prova.<sup>1</sup>

Both explanations raise a number of problems, however, as Alessandro D'Ancona long ago noted in his commentary.<sup>2</sup> In view of the fact that *vita nova* is a Latin expression, the connotation 'youth' or even 'adolescence' is extremely inaccurate, given the numerous formulas Dante might have used instead. If anything, such a meaning could only emerge in hindsight, with regard to both the poem's *factio* and the underlying reality of the poet's biography.

Nevertheless, the choice of the expression "Incipit vita nova" could not be justified even if Dante had meant to express the idea of a 'renewal of love.' From the reader's point of view, in fact, had the phrase been 'invented' by the author, it would not have been comprehensible in the locus in which it first appears. In other words, the origin of the title must necessarily be traced back to earlier occurrences and usages of the syntagma which would likely have been familiar to any experienced medieval reader, given the context of the events narrated by Dante.<sup>3</sup>



It should be observed here that Gorni notes that a few occurrences of the phrase 'vita nova' had been identified in a text attributed to Augustine and especially in *XII Sermones centum* by Hugh (or perhaps more likely Richard) of Saint Victor. These texts, however, seem to bear little relation to Dante's *libello*: "Cantate Domino canticum novum [ . . . ] Canticum est vita, canticum novum vita nova, canticum vetus vita vetus."<sup>4</sup> In consonance with this reasoning, Simona Bargetto and Corrado Bologna later provided further support for the Pauline implications of the syntagma, in connection especially with the ritual performed in the closing cantos of the *Purgatorio*.<sup>5</sup>

An extensive survey of the patristic tradition, however, reveals many more occurrences of the syntagmas 'vita nova' and 'nova vita.' In particular, it is largely attested in the works by Augustine, as in the following examples:

Propter ipsum initium *novae vitae*, propter novum hominem quem iubemur induere, et exuere veterem (*Epistolae*, 55.3)

Novus cantet, si novum cantat. Quid est, novus cantet? Desiderio *novae vitae* innovetur . . . (*Sermones*, 22A.1)

Posita [misericordia Dei] autem a David dicente, id est, a *nova vita*, Christi vita, vita quae per Christum nobis data est, insultans vitae veteri, felicitati veteri hominum, et illis qui in eam spem ponunt, et illis qui adipiscuntur eam et in illa gaudent (*Sermones*, 32.18)

Qui ergo novit *novam vitam* amare, novit canticum novum cantare (*Sermones*, 34.1)

Vos ergo, fratres, vos filii, vos novella germina matris Ecclesiae [recently baptized], obsecro vos per quod accepistis, ut attendatis in eum qui vos vocavit, qui dilexit vos, qui perditos quaesivit vos, qui inventos illuminavit vos, ut non secemini vias perditorum, in quibus errat nomen fidelium: non enim quaeritur quid vocentur, sed utrum nomini suo consonent. Si natus est, ubi est *nova vita*? (*Sermones*, 228.2)

Sed resurrectionem Christi consideremus, carissimi; quoniam sicut eius passio significavit nostram veterem vitam, sic eius resurrectio sacramentum est *novae vitae* (*Sermones*, 229E.3)

Resurrectio autem Domini nostri Iesu Christi *nova vita* est credentium in Iesum (*Sermones*, 231.2)

Ips[e] [Christus] est enim qui ascendit super occasum: sive quia non eum excipit *nova vita* se ad eum convertentis, nisi vetus occiderit huic saeculo renuntiantis; sive quia ascendit super occasum, cum resurgendo vicit corporis casum. Dominus enim nomen est ei (*In Psalmum 67 enarratio*, 5)

Initium enim mensis, nova luna est; nova luna, *nova vita* est (*In Psalmum 80 enarratio*, 6)

et lunae novae observatio, *vitalis novae* est sanctificatio (*Tractatus adversus Iudaeos*, 2)

idem apostolus monet ut exuti consuetudine peccatorum, id est, vetere homine, induamur *nova vita* Christi, quem novum hominem appellat (*Contra Adimantum Manichaei discipulum*, 5)

Baptismus igitur Sacramentum est *novae vitae* ac salutis aeternae (*Contra Cresconium* . . . , II, 13)<sup>6</sup>.

The instances where the syntagma ‘vita nova’ appears together with the verb ‘incipit’ are particularly relevant:

Et ideo baptizavit Iohannes [John the Baptist] in poenitentiam; finitur enim vetus *vita* usque ad poenitentiam, atque inde *incipit nova* (*De diversis quaestionibus octaginta tribus*, 58.1)

Hoc habet ipsa vis sacramenti [baptism]: sacramentum enim est *vitalis novae*, quae in hoc tempore *incipit* a remissione praeteritorum omnium peccatorum, perficitur autem in resurrectione mortuorum (*Sermones*, 260A.1).<sup>7</sup>

The syntagma appears more sporadically in other medieval Christian authors as well, such as in Rufinus’ translation of a text by Origen (“Perit namque vita eius prior et *incipit novam vitam*, quae in Christo est”: *In Numeros homiliae*, hom. 18.4); in the Venerable Bede (“*Vita nova* laetantium”: *De operibus sex dierum primordialium* . . . , Hymnus 6, str. 8); and in Isaac of Stella (“in veteribus membris *vita nova*”: *Sermones*, 35.9). It has not, however, been attested in works of classical or Middle Latin secular authors.<sup>8</sup>

This brief survey allows us to conclude that the syntagma ‘vita nova’ derives from the Christian tradition, and that it signified not only the renewal of spiritual life through conversion but the new life made possible by Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, a conversion that could take place in any moment during a person’s life, though especially at baptism. It is more than probable that Dante became familiar with this particular connotation

while reading one of the Augustinian texts quoted above, but the connotation had already thoroughly penetrated scholastic theology, as it is evident from the section of the *Summa theologiae* devoted to baptism:

Tum etiam quia per baptismum configuratur homo passioni et resurrectioni Christi in quantum moritur peccato et *incipit novam iustitiae vitam*.<sup>9</sup>

We are now in a position to speculate with greater certainty about the genesis and meaning of the title of the *libello*. Dante wanted the reader to perceive from the very beginning of his work the religious context in which the story of his extraordinary love for Beatrice would take place. The biblical calques informing the experience Dante undergoes as a result of his first meeting with Beatrice reveal the poet's intention:

Apparve vestita di nobilissimo colore umile e onesto sanguigno, cinta e ornate alla guisa che alla sua giovanissima etade si convenia. In quel punto dico veracemente che lo spirito della vita, lo quale dimora nella secretissima camera del cuore, cominciò a tremare sì fortemente, che apparì anelli menomi polsi orribilmente; e tremando disse queste parole: «Ecce Deus fortior me, qui veniens dominabitur michi!». In quel punto lo spirito animale, lo quale dimora nell'alta camera nella quale tutti li spiriti sensitivi portano le loro percezioni, si cominciò a meravigliare molto, e parlando specialmente alli spiriti del viso, disse queste parole: «Apparuit iam beatitudo vestra!». In quel punto lo spirito naturale, lo quale dimora in quella parte ove si ministra lo nutrimento nostro, cominciò a piangere, e piangendo disse queste parole: «Heu, miser, quia frequenter impeditus ero deinceps!» (ed. Gorni, I.4–7)

Apart from the Latin phrase in the last sentence, which seems to evoke an elegiac ethos and whose antecedent can be traced back to Boethius,<sup>10</sup> the previous two are interwoven with references from the Old and New Testaments. In the first, Isaiah's verse "Ecce Dominus Deus in fortitudine veniet, et brachium dominabitur" (Isaiah 40:10) is conflated with a phrase spoken by John the Baptist concerning the different forms of baptism: "Ego quidem aqua baptizo vos; *veniet autem fortior me*, cuius non sum dignus solvere corrigiam calceamentorum eius; ipse vos baptizabit in Spiritu sancto et igni" (Luke 3:16: italics mine); in the second Luke ("Apparuit autem illi angelus Domini": Luke 1:11) is combined with a Pauline expression ("Ubi est ergo beatitudo vestra?": Gal. 4:15).<sup>11</sup> The biblical and Christological allusiveness is in any case an essential component of the figure of the woman-angel, and Dante's stylistic choices manifest the

way he manages to re-use elements endowed with the semantics of religious experience to characterize his love for Beatrice.<sup>12</sup> The encounter with Beatrice then turns out to be a fundamental preparation for the future encounter with Christ: a kind of ‘baptism in Christ,’ analogous to the one prefigured in the Gospels<sup>13</sup> and performed, according to an old patristic interpretation, during Pentecost or on similar liturgical occasions. In Dante’s *libello*, the disclosure of this truth will take place gradually, given that at the beginning the god of Love dominates the poet-character’s soul. Only after Beatrice’s death does Dante understand, by means of a vision, the true meaning of his amatory experience, which has triggered a “new life”.<sup>14</sup>

To be more specific, we can note that in the proem Dante carries out a sort of “reconversion” of the formula ‘incipit vita nova’. Since the poet adopts the *topos* of the book of memory, the Augustinian-patristic phrase “vita nova” takes on naturally its status as a title, which is also assured in this instance by the term *rubrica* and by the meaning of *incipit*: Dante was probably aware of similar formulas, for example, in Bonaventure’s *Legenda (maior and minor)*, the beginning: *Incipit (minor) vita Sancti Francisci*.<sup>15</sup>

Once one has appreciated the significance of Dante’s inspiration, the reader cannot fail to consider as pertinent the connotation that, at the end of the 13th century, one was supposed to perceive when reading the peremptory sentence ‘incipit vita nova’: here begins a true and authentic Christian life (by quoting Augustine’s words: “nova vita, Christi vita, vita quae per Christum nobis data est”). It is not simply a conversion (the new life as compared with the old one), but rather the dazzling start of a symbolic-initiatory journey which, in *dolce stil novo* terms, has long been interpreted as an assertion of the power of love, and which instead at the end leads to a new interpretation of Beatrice’s nature and of the role of the poet and future singer of the woman-miracle and, therefore, of Christ through her.

That this series of connotations proves essential to the comprehension of the ultimate meaning of the narrative centered on Beatrice is also confirmed by the privileged relationship between the *libello* and the closing cantos of the *Purgatorio*, where the loved woman reappears as an emissary of God’s will at the moment in which the pilgrim achieves his final state of bliss. It is here that Dante repents of his sins and undergoes a new, definitive and purificatory baptism by water, though also by fire and spirit, as was imperative for the exceptional story of a human being chosen to

visit the underworld in order to communicate to humankind a prophecy of divine truth.<sup>16</sup>

In sum, the ritual of the new baptism in Eden is, essentially, a ritual of rebirth, where the *adnominatio* of the root *nov(ell)* refers with high rhetorical effect to a life that is definitively ‘nova’:

Io ritornai da la santissima onda  
rifatto sì come piante novelle  
rinnovellate di novella fronda,  
puro e disposto a salire le stelle.  
(*Purg.* 33.142–5)

Università di Pisa,  
Pisa, Italy

## NOTES

\*Citations are from the *Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata* edited by Giorgio Petrocchi (Milan: Mondadori, 1966–67), compared with the *Comedia*, ed. Federico Sanguineti (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2001). The *Vita nova* is quoted according to the edition of Guglielmo Gorni (Dante, *Opere*, vol. 1 [Milan: Mondadori, 2011], 745–1063). Also taken into consideration are the editions published by Gorni himself for Einaudi (Turin, 1996) and by Domenico De Robertis. For the *Rime*, we follow the edition edited by Claudio Giunta (Dante, *Opere*, vol. 1 [Milan: Mondadori, 2011], 3–744).

1. See in particular G. Gorni, *Dante prima della “Commedia”* (Fiesole: Cadmo, 2001), 131 and 133–6, which he draws on for the content in his 2011 commentary. In his 1996 commentary, however, Gorni had clearly interpreted “‘vita nuova’ in senso paolino (anche a norma del capitolo “Vita secundum Christum” dell’epistola *Ad Colossenses* 3, 1–17), illuminata dalla grazia di Beatrice” (ed. cit., 4). In the Pauline passage according to the *Vulgata*, the expression ‘vita nova’ does not appear. For other considerations about the *incipit*, see finally E. Malato, “L’incipit della *Vita nuova*,” *Rivista di studi danteschi* 10 (2010): 95–105.

2. See *La Vita nuova di Dante Alighieri riscontrata su codici e stampe*, ed. A. D’Ancona (Pisa: Nistri, 1884<sup>2</sup>), 2–4. See also J. A. Scott, *Notes on religion and the “Vita nuova,”* *Italian Studies* 20 (1965), 17–25, especially 17.

3. For other objections to this interpretation, see Gorni, *Dante . . .*, cit., 134ff.

4. For the references, see again Gorni, *Dante . . .*, cit.

5. See S. Bargetto, *Il “battesimo di fuoco”: memorie liturgiche nel XXVII canto del “Purgatorio,”* *Lettere Italiane* 49 (1997), 185–247; C. Bologna, *Il ritorno di Beatrice. Simmetrie dantesche tra “Vita nova,” “Petrose” e “Commedia”* (Rome: Salerno, 1998), especially 92ff.

6. The references are cited from the website [www.augustinus.it](http://www.augustinus.it). In addition to the occurrences listed here, there are many more in which the syntagma appears in a less evident form, for example with the interposition of various words between noun and adjective. For specific examples, see the following note. On Augustine’s presence in the works of Dante, see L.F. Pizzolato, “Presenza e assenza di Agostino in Dante,” *Testo n.s.* 32 (2011), 17–34.

7. *Sermon* 260A, which offers one of the most characteristic attestations, has only recently been re-attributed to Augustine. It circulated extensively as a treatise on the sacrament of baptism, and is, for example, quoted in the closing of the *De cognitione baptismi* by Ildephonsus of Toledo: see *Sancti*

*Augustini sermones post maurinos reperti, probatae dumtaxat auctoritatis, nunc primum disquisiti in unum collecti et codicum fide instaurati, studio ac diligentia D. Germani Morin O.S.B., Romae, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1930, 34–8; S. Agostino, Discorsi IV.2 (230–272/b), sui tempi liturgici, translated and edited by P. Bellini, F. Cruciani, V. Tarulli (Rome: Città Nuova Editrice, 1984), 846–53. This sermon was probably recited on the Octave of Easter (maybe between 400 and 450) for the newly baptized, both infants and adults, and it is probable that it was read again in homilies dedicated to neophytes until the Late Middle Ages (this was implicitly recommended also in the treaty by Ildephonsus.)*

8. We have consulted the following databases: CLCLT-S (*Library of Latin Texts*, ed. 2002); *Patrologia Latina* (ed. on-line); *Poetria Nova* (*Latin Medieval Poetry*, 650–1250 A.D.). We decided to omit other not particularly meaningful examples, where the syntagma appears often but in a split form.

9. Sancti Thomae de Aquino, *Summa Theologiae*, Cinisello Balsamo, ed. Paoline, 1988<sup>2</sup>, III, q. 66, a. 2 (2485), 2197; italics mine. *Quaestio* 66 deals with many unresolved issues regarding the sacrament of baptism, in particular those concerning its various forms attested in the Holy Scriptures: see *Articulus* 11 (2494), *Utrum convenienter describantur tria baptismata, scilicet aquae, sanguinis et flaminis* (2206), which will be discussed further on.

10. See S. Carrai, *Dante elegiaco. Una chiave di lettura per la “Vita nova,”* Florence: Olschki, 2006), 33.

11. See Gorni’s comment, ed. 2011 cit., 802–3, which does not indicate the last reference to the epistle to the Galatians, which would be appropriate instead, considering that in the previous verse St. Paul says he has been received “sicut angelum Dei” [ . . . ] sicut Christum Iesum”, which highlights the sacral dimension of Beatrice’s apparition that lies beneath her “secular” identity. It is appropriate, in this regard, to make a comparison with the three sentences in Latin marking the re-appearance of Beatrice in *Purg.* 30.11, 19, 21: see also *infra*.

12. See Carrai, op. cit. 69ff., and also for the previous bibliography.

13. Besides Luke 3:16, already quoted, see Mark 1:8 and John 1:33 and 3:5–8. It is essential to remember that in a lyric that antedates the *Vita nova* despite being linked to it, Dante provides a different account of his first contact with Beatrice, whose birth is said to produce a strong emotional response in Dante, who was only six months old at that time: “Lo giorno che costei nel mondo venne, / secondo che si truova / nel libro della mente che vien meno, / la mia persona pargola sostenne / una passion nova, / tal ch’io rimasi di paura pieno; / ch’a tutte mie virtù fu posto un freno / subitamente sì ch’io caddi in terra / per una luce che nel cuor percosse; / e se ’l libro non erra, / lo spirito maggior tremò sì forte / che parve ben che morte / per lui in questo mondo giunta fosse; / ma or ne ’ncresce a quei che questo mosse” (*E’ m’incresce di me sì duramente*, vv. 57–70). Even if it may seem excessive to insist on a link between Beatrice’s birth and Dante’s baptism, it is clear that the mysterious connection is realized through a kind of illumination that strikes the heart of the still infant poet, similar to the way St. Paul was illuminated on his journey to Damascus (as Giunta highlights in his commentary, cit., 235–6, though for other purposes).

14. On the visions in *Vita nova* (after the classical studies of Charles S. Singleton), see in particular M. Tavoni, “Converrebbe essere me laudatore di me medesimo” (*Vita nova* XXVIII 2), in *Studi in onore di Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo per i suoi settant’anni, a cura degli allievi padovani* (Florence: Sismel-Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2007), 253–61 (also for other bibliography).

15. See the database *In principio. Incipit Index of Latin Texts* ([www.brepols.net/pdf/Brepolis\\_INPR\\_IT.pdf](http://www.brepols.net/pdf/Brepolis_INPR_IT.pdf)); other formulas are also typical, such as *Vita Virgilii Poetae incipit* (in *Vita virgiliana gudian*). Examples from this vast catalogue indicate that ‘incipit,’ even in the Late Middle Ages, does not always designate simply and solely the beginning of a title, but retains a particular semantic value (‘vita nova begins’).

16. On these aspects, see Bargetto, *Il ‘battesimo di fuoco’* . . . , cit., 185–94, and Bologna, *Il ritorno di Beatrice* . . . , cit., especially 94–7 and 130 for the essential bibliography on baptism; for some liturgical and poetic implications, see also R.L. Martinez, “‘L’amoroso canto’: Liturgy and Vernacular Lyric in Dante’s *Purgatorio*,” *Dante Studies* 127 (2009), 93–128. For the social-historical implications of baptism and for its relevance in the Florentine context through the Late Middle Ages, see the volume edited by A. Prosperi, *Salvezza delle anime, disciplina dei corpi. Un seminario sulla storia del*

*battesimo* (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2006), in particular 16ff. and 143–9; for Augustine, see M. Campopiano, “Il destino dell’individuo dopo la morte: battesimo, pene purificatrici, pene temporanee e Ultimo Giudizio nel pensiero di St. Augustine,” in *Salvezza delle anime, disciplina dei corpi. Un seminario sulla storia del battesimo*, ed. A. Prosperi (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2006), 67–99. On the possible links between the *Vita nova* and the closing cantos of the *Purgatorio*, see M. Santagata, *L’io e il mondo. Un’interpretazione di Dante* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011), in particular 234ff.

# Paura del senso e timore di Dio: Misticismo nella *Divina Commedia*

FORTUNATO TRIONE

La tristezza secondo Dio produce un pentimento  
irrevocabile che porta alla salvezza, mentre la  
tristezza del mondo produce la morte.  
2 Cor 7:11

## I

La paura è l'inizio di ogni vero cammino spirituale, come si legge nei Salmi (111:10), nei Proverbi (1:7, 9:10, 14:27) o nella Seconda Lettera ai Corinzi (7:11).<sup>1</sup> Per San Bernardo la santità non sarebbe raggiungibile senza il sentimento della paura;<sup>2</sup> mentre per San Tommaso il timore di Dio è l'origine stessa della saggezza.<sup>3</sup> La fenomenologia dell'esperienza del divino non nasce infatti da qualche apparizione luminosa o da fenomeni estatici, ma dal dolore e dalla confusione. Così come la decisione di seguire un cammino spirituale non è altro all'inizio che fronteggiare il proprio smarrimento, capirne le cause ed intraprendere sinceramente la via per liberarsi da esso. I primi due canti della *Commedia* nascono all'insegna della paura più profonda, termine che ricorre ben cinque volte solo nel primo canto dell'*Inferno*, e si presenta come un moto dell'animo tanto forte da far "tremar le vene e i polsi" (90), da condurre il pellegrino sull'orlo della morte (6), da fargli decidere di intraprendere il cammino spirituale (2.136-42). Leggere il poema dantesco da uno studio sul sentimento della paura, suggerisce una prospettiva precisa nell'approccio all'opera del poeta italiano, vale a dire la dimensione propriamente mistica della *Commedia*. Per misticismo si intende l'esperienza diretta della presenza divina. In tal senso il termine esperienza, designa la conoscenza



immediata, più precisamente la conoscenza affettiva di una realtà, come distinta da una conoscenza solamente astratta e concettuale di essa.<sup>4</sup>

Misticismo, esperienza diretta, conoscenza affettiva, tutte espressioni che si riferiscono ad un contatto immediato e totalmente coinvolgente con l'oggetto del proprio desiderio. Le guide spirituali care a Dante, Ugo e Riccardo di San Vittore, San Bernardo, San Bonaventura e San Tommaso descrivono l'unione con il divino in termini di un'esperienza che afferra e coinvolge l'uomo nella sua totalità corporale e spirituale; e l'anima partecipa a tal punto al sentire che proviene dall'incontro tanto desiderato da risultarne trasformata, "trasumana[ta]" (*Par.* 1.70), fin nei movimenti primigeni stessi della conoscenza, vale a dire della sensazione e della percezione.<sup>5</sup> La prova e la conferma dell'unione con il divino, dell'avvenuta consumazione e realizzazione spirituale non si manifesta, infatti, in qualche nuova o straordinaria idea che improvvisamente chiarisce un concetto o risolve un dubbio, ma attraverso la consapevolezza di essere stati invasi e segnati da una impressione particolare, completamente nuova e differente da tutto quello sperimentato fino ad allora. L'impressione e l'impronta divina si scopre così profondamente radicale, perché capace di riordinare e ristrutturare le facoltà dell'anima stesse, capaci ora di sentire fin nei sensi la presenza spirituale. Il momento della sperata accoglienza nella vita dello spirito è descritto effettivamente come la percezione di un piacere, precisamente di una 'dolcezza,' come insegnavano San Tommaso e San Bernardo.<sup>6</sup> Anche per Dante l'avvenuta visione e consumazione divina si rende oggettiva, concreta e memorabile per una sensazione di dolcezza senza pari che avvolge ora l'anima: "tutta quanta cessa / mia visione, e ancor mi distilla / nel core il *dolce* che nacque da essa" (*Par.* 33.61–63).

La paura e l'estremo piacere sono i due momenti, altrettanto fondanti e originari, della relazione tra l'uomo e Dio. Sono il lato esperienziale della religione, la prova concreta ed effettiva dell'avvenuto contatto con l'oggetto del proprio desiderio. Come vedremo meglio più avanti, la paura, o meglio, il timore di Dio, sarà la vera speranza e gioia futura del credente di poter esperire la vita dello spirito direttamente, e non solo come contenuto intellettuale ed astratto; sarà il primo vero segno della presenza divina nel cuore dell'uomo. Proprio al *core* Dante fa riferimento nei versi dell'ultimo canto del *Paradiso* che abbiamo citato poco sopra, come del luogo dove rimane il *dolce* dell'effetto del contatto divino. Così come nei primi canti dell'*Inferno*, la paura si percepisce più intensamente

nel cuore, che è descritto come “compunto,” trafitto dal terrore per la presenza delle bestie (*Inf.* 1.15). Il cuore nella mistica cristiana è considerato la sede della volontà, come scrive San Tommaso.<sup>7</sup> Nel cuore la grazia si rende sensibile, ed è nel cuore che l'attività spirituale prende vita, non nell'anima.<sup>8</sup> Infatti, come si credeva nel Medioevo, è proprio il cuore il luogo dove l'anima incontra la sua sede e la principale connessione con il corpo.<sup>9</sup>

## II

Questa maniera di comunicare la condizione del pellegrino dantesco attraverso un linguaggio in cui è proprio l'io del viandante nella sua complessità sensoriale, intellettuale e spirituale ad essere il centro della conoscenza, appartiene alla sfera semantica dell'affetto. L'attenzione primaria alla dimensione affettiva della ricerca spirituale, piuttosto che solamente a quella speculativa, permette di considerare come oggetto di studio proprio la realtà percettiva del sentire individuale, sia nella sua forma carnale che spirituale. Infatti la distinzione stessa tra affetti carnali e spirituali sarà una distinzione rispetto all'oggetto verso il quale l'anima si espone ed apre, non rispetto al movimento di apertura stesso, che rimane il principio di ogni possibile unione e contatto. In tal senso lo stesso cammino spirituale sarà un meraviglioso viaggio attraverso il sentire umano che da carnale diventa spirituale, da naturale diventa divino, perché, come sostiene San Tommaso, la grazia non distrugge la natura, ma la perfeziona;<sup>10</sup> e lo stesso San Bernardo, descrive l'intero cammino verso Dio come un viaggio dai sensi della carne ai sensi dello spirito.<sup>11</sup> Il valore dell'esperienza affettiva è così insostituibile e primario, caratterizzando il termine stesso 'esperienza' per una apertura completa e sincera all'oggetto della propria ricerca. Dio stesso si riconosce veramente presente solo quando si rivelerà come contatto diretto, non in parole o concetti astratti, come scrive San Bernardo;<sup>12</sup> e l'esperienza stessa, sottolinea ancora il santo di Clairvaux, non è applicabile ad un altro, ma deve essere vissuta pienamente da ognuno.<sup>13</sup> Sotto questo punto di vista, vale dire del contatto diretto e personale con ciò che si vuole incontrare ed amare con tutta l'anima, l'esperienza di paradiso non è diversa da qualsiasi altra esperienza, di essa Dante dice che “non gustata, non si intende mai” (*Par.* 2.39).<sup>14</sup>

Il termine *affectus/affectio* nella psicologia medievale, e soprattutto nella guida spirituale per eccellenza della *Commedia*, San Bernardo, rappresenta

il termine più importante per designare il rapporto dell'anima con Dio.<sup>15</sup> L'affetto indica la disposizione dell'anima ad essere avvolta e penetrata da una qualche influenza esterna o interna, e principalmente dalla volontà dell'altro, sia che si tratti di quella dell'altro uomo o di Dio. La possibilità stessa dell'esperienza divina non sarà altro che una purificazione degli affetti, come scrive San Bernardo: "all carnal necessity will disappear, the love of the flesh will be absorbed by that of the spirit and our present, weak, human affections will be changed into divine."<sup>16</sup> Dante si mostra particolarmente sensibile all'insegnamento di questo maestro della spiritualità affettiva,<sup>17</sup> ed in cima al *Paradiso*, nei versi finali del trentaduesimo canto, è proprio San Bernardo che guida il pellegrino all'unione mistica nella sola maniera concessa all'uomo, vale a dire attraverso l'incitamento, lo stimolo, l'appello all'affezione: "e tu mi seguirai con l'affezione / sí che dal dicer mio lo cor non parti" (149–50).<sup>18</sup> Beatrice stessa in *Paradiso* 29 ricorderà a Dante, quasi come un comandamento, che solo all'affetto individuale la grazia divina si renderà sensibile: "non voglio che dubbi, ma sia certo, / che ricever la grazia è meritorio / secondo che l'affetto l'è aperto" (64–66).<sup>19</sup>

Dante sembra aver considerato in maniera profonda il valore primario della vita affettiva al punto da farne un principio di poetica. Il poeta italiano infatti intuisce fin dalle prime battute del poema che non si arriva all'esperienza divina senza un cambiamento fondamentale del proprio stesso modo di percepire e di sentire. Per questo non ci si deve allontanare dal sentire, ma, al contrario, aprirsi ad esso per provarsi e riprovarsi, apprendere e fare attenzione alle proprie reazioni, per potersi correggere proprio nell'attimo del contatto sensoriale, affinché non si instaurino abitudini negative, affinché sia sempre presente il desiderio divino. Già dai primi canti della *Commedia* Dante immerge il suo viaggio nel mondo della sensorialità, di una sensorialità presente e terribile come quella della paura, e di una sensorialità da venire e sperare, come sarà l'esperienza divina che il pellegrino "tocc[herà]" (24.143) nel *Paradiso*.<sup>20</sup> L'importanza di sottolineare la centralità della vita affettiva come principio stesso di poetica diventa fondamentale quando si considera l'opera dantesca come un viaggio verso Dio. Come tale il pellegrino, ed il lettore con lui, devono poter imparare a distinguere un sentire carnale ed uno sensuale;<sup>21</sup> perchè il contatto con le creature e con Dio si svolge in maniera diversa, anche se in uno stesso corpo.<sup>22</sup>

Il termine affetto sembra così rappresentare nella maniera più completa il carattere processuale dell'esperienza, sia nel suo aspetto più propriamente dinamico di incontro con l'oggetto desiderato, per l'attenzione primaria alla volontà ed all'arbitrio individuale; sia in quello di purificazione dell'anima, che si perfeziona e si rende ricettiva alla vita dello spirito grazie al movimento desiderativo stesso verso il proprio fine. L'intera vita individuale viene descritta di conseguenza in termini di distinti affetti nella loro relazione con l'altro uomo e con Dio; in tal modo il viaggio spirituale non è un sopprimere le passioni o negare la propria natura sensuale, ma un riorientare la vita affettiva verso il fine divino piuttosto che limitarla e relegarla alla sola consistenza corporale. La paura (*timor*), insieme all'amore (*amor*), la gioia (*gaudium*) e la tristezza (*tristitia*), sono considerati nella mistica cistercense i quattro affetti che compongono l'anima individuale.<sup>23</sup> Di questi, l'amore e la paura vengono descritti come affetti relazionali, perché si indirizzano ad un 'oggetto' esterno, come Dio o il prossimo, mentre la gioia e la tristezza appartengono all'interiorità personale.<sup>24</sup> Proprio la paura è la prima affezione che l'uomo percepisce più intensamente non solo nella sua relazione con il divino, ma anche nella sua carnalità e corporalità, nel momento in cui si rende conto della inevitabile perdita, fine e morte di se stesso come essere che si riconosce tale nella sua interrelazione sensoriale con il mondo esterno. La distinzione tra un sentire carnale ed uno spirituale fa parte della stessa natura umana, del suo essere composto da sostanza soggetta a corruzione e distruzione (*Purg.* 25.37–61, *Par.* 7.124–38) e da una presenza immortale e divina (*Purg.* 25.67–75, *Par.* 7.139–48). Come tale l'uomo può fare esperienza di se stesso come essere divino e come appartenente alle sole leggi naturali.<sup>25</sup>

Questa distinzione tra una forma di esperienza carnale ed una divina ha delle basi filosofiche e teologiche nel medioevo di Dante. In altri termini, proprio ai tempi del poeta italiano le discussioni sull'anima, sulla sua natura divina e carnale, sull'intelletto e sulla separazione tra filosofia e teologia, si stavano definendo e chiarendosi, grazie principalmente alle traduzioni di Aristotele. La penetrazione della filosofia di Aristotele nel tredicesimo secolo, soprattutto attraverso le traduzioni arabe delle opere del filosofo greco,<sup>26</sup> determinò un profondo e ricco ripensamento all'interno del mondo cristiano, sia per quanto riguarda la teologia che la filosofia naturale.<sup>27</sup> Da un punto di vista cristiano, e soprattutto dantesco, Aristotele era considerato come il filosofo più importante dell'antichità; vale a dire di un pensiero privo della redenzione cristiana. La filosofia

dello Stagirita rappresentava la perfetta conoscenza permessa all'uomo dopo il peccato originale e prima della venuta di Cristo; come la perfetta conoscenza permessa all'uomo privato dei beni soprannaturali.<sup>28</sup> Il filosofo greco veniva infatti a rappresentare un sapere basato sulle sole capacità della ragione, senza nessun intervento divino.<sup>29</sup> Il poeta italiano, come molti pensatori del suo tempo, rimase affascinato dalla filosofia di Aristotele e dalla straordinaria libertà ed ampiezza di conoscenza che offriva all'orizzonte umano. Per Dante, come per molti suoi contemporanei, Aristotele era il "maestro di color che sanno" (*Inf.* 4.13), ma non di color che credono, e proprio in questa tensione tra le possibilità e gli obiettivi della ragione e della fede nasce l'esigenza di un cammino spirituale, l'esigenza di rendere oggettive e concrete le verità di fede, con la stessa sicurezza e concretezza con le quali la ragione stessa spiegava la realtà fenomenica.

Dante visse come esperienza personale e profonda questa battaglia dei due pensieri, come nella grande canzone *Voi che 'ntendendo il terzo ciel movete*, tra un sapere filosofico ed uno religioso, come attesta non solo la drammatica crisi spirituale che porta all'interruzione del *Convivio*, ma nella *Commedia* stessa Dante torna più volte su questa conflittualità, e sulle false pretese della filosofia in termini di conoscenza ed esperienza divina. Nel paradiso terrestre per esempio, dove il pellegrino comincia per la prima volta a sperimentare direttamente i piaceri di una vita senza peccato e le promesse della religione stessa (*Purg.* 28.7–21, 76–102). Nell'ultimo canto del *Purgatorio* è infatti Beatrice che ammonisce il pellegrino a smettere di voler continuare ad interpretare le sue parole e quello che si mostra e si rivela attraverso le armi della filosofia. Beatrice gli dice che il suo intelletto è "fatto di pietra e impetrato" (74) a causa dei "pensieri vani" (68), i pensieri mondani, che oscurano la mente. Ma Beatrice è ancora più precisa e penetra esattamente nell'errore di Dante. Dante non capisce le sue parole proprio perché si sforza ancora di volerle penetrare con le armi della filosofia, non con quelle della religione: "«perché conoschi», disse, «quella scuola / c'hai seguitata, e veggì sua dottrina / come puoi seguitar mia parola; / e veggì vostra via da la divina / distar cotanto, quanto si discorda / da terra il ciel che più alto festina» (85–90). La filosofia, definita come la *vostra via*, dista dalla via divina come la distanza che c'è tra la terra e il primo mobile; una distanza enorme che non può essere completata da occhio umano.<sup>30</sup> Quello che manca a Dante per comprendere pienamente le parole di Beatrice è l'esperienza diretta dell'incontro con le verità di

fede, incontro che proprio nel paradiso terrestre comincia a manifestarsi. Le parole di Beatrice accennano ad un limite della filosofia nei riguardi della materia divina. Alla filosofia è negata la capacità di insegnare quell'esperienza diretta, quella gioia della comunione tra divino ed umano che solo la religione può realizzare.<sup>31</sup> Dante ha provato la capacità di poter dominare i suoi stessi sentimenti e di interpretare la realtà grazie alla riflessione filosofica: tra le altre, le pagine del *Convivio*, dove Dante dice che proprio grazie allo studio filosofico fu in grado di curare il suo animo dopo la morte di Beatrice (2.2).<sup>32</sup> Beatrice accusa Dante di voler provare a penetrare la nuova esperienza paradisiaca con i mezzi della filosofia, la quale, se per ogni altro tipo di esperienza mondana e contingente è in grado di insegnare e di rappresentare, di esserne precisa espressione linguistica e trascrizione fedele, non riesce ad adempiere la stessa funzione in materia divina.<sup>33</sup>

Le riflessioni sui rapporti tra filosofia e religione ritornano costanti nelle opere del poeta italiano, nel tentativo di trovare un'armonia piuttosto che una separazione tra due forme di conoscenza, entrambe espressioni intrinseche delle possibilità della mente umana. Nella *Monarchia* la filosofia e la religione sono come fedeli compagni nella via che conduce verso la felicità di questa vita e della vita eterna (3.4.7).<sup>34</sup> Nel *Convivio* la filosofia "è un amoroso uso di sapienza, lo quale massimamente è in Dio" (3.12), e viene sempre più caratterizzata teologicamente ed innamorata della sapienza divina più che esserne nemica: "filosofia per subietto materiale qui ha la sapienza, e per forma ha amore, e per composto de l'uno e de l'altro l'uso di speculazione" (3.2), oppure poco più avanti, nello stesso capitolo del terzo libro: "dove la Filosofia è in atto, si dichina un celestial pensiero, nel quale si ragiona questa essere più che umana operazione" (2).<sup>35</sup>

La filosofia, come conoscenza basata esclusivamente sulle leggi naturali, non scompare nel viaggio della *Commedia*, ma diventa parte del processo di conversione stesso dell'anima, dello sforzo della ragione di arrivare ai suoi stessi limiti affinché la presenza dello spirito possa rivelarsi più chiaramente, senza errori né illusioni, per non confondersi, per non trattare il sentimento divino alla stregua di uno carnale. L'insegnamento della spiritualità affettiva che Dante imparò a conoscere profondamente da San Bernardo, ma anche grazie a San Bonaventura e San Tommaso,<sup>36</sup> viene accolto in questo movimento di purificazione e conversione alla realizzazione divina alla luce delle nuove possibilità interpretative offerte dalla

filosofia aristotelica per definire e capire meglio la qualità e la progressione del sentire nel cammino spirituale. Così anche la paura, quella paura che segna drammaticamente gli inizi del viaggio dantesco, si presenta nella *Commedia* sia come effetto della possibilità, sempre incombente, di un danno fisico o morale, di un male del senso e della morte stessa, all'interno di una struttura psicologica aristotelica, quindi filosofica; sia in riferimento ad un contesto teologico-mistico, in cui la paura, anzi il timore di Dio, è studiato come uno tra i sette doni dello spirito santo e viene considerato il primo effetto dell'amore divino.

### III

La paura è un sentimento primordiale; è quel terrore che assale quando si è soli in una foresta, o di notte in una strada buia e solitaria, paura di essere divorati e attaccati, dell'estinzione fisica violenta. L'angoscia che si legge nel primo canto dell'*Inferno*, quando il pellegrino si trova di fronte alle bestie, bestie che si presentano come muri invalicabili, che sono in sé "compatte, opache, cieche,"<sup>37</sup> al di là del significato allegorico, ci pone di fronte a questa paura dell'uomo che proviene da un passato ancestrale, quando il pericolo di essere sbranati da animali feroci era presente e terribile,<sup>38</sup> quando la forza del corpo dominava la relazione tra gli esseri. Ma la paura, anzi il timore, è anche quello che si prova di fronte a Dio: è il sentire la profonda distanza che separa la creatura dal suo creatore, la propria inadeguatezza e i propri limiti, ma anche la paura di morire senza aver avuto l'esperienza divina.

Proprio il timore di Dio è considerato l'inizio della saggezza e la porta della carità; conduce alla speranza, non alla disperazione. Nel secondo canto dell'*Inferno*, quando il pellegrino sembra più sicuro e protetto dalla paura del senso, dalle bestie feroci, ecco nascere l'altra paura, il timore di fronte all'"altro viaggio" (*Inf.* 1.89) che dovrebbe portarlo fin di fronte a Dio (24–36). Dante sente l'enorme distanza che lo separa dall'immagine divina, ma Virgilio lo incoraggia e lo invita a considerare nel giusto modo questo suo senso di inferiorità: come il riconoscimento di una condizione da superare, non sulla quale piangere la propria miseria. Virgilio accusa Dante di "viltade . . . / la qual molte fiate l'uomo ingombra" (45–46), parole che sembrano riecheggiare quelle di San Bernardo: "we should, therefore, fear that ignorance which gives us a too low opinion of ourselves,"<sup>39</sup> l'ignoranza di considerarsi incapaci dell'esperienza dello spirito.

Alla paura si oppone proprio la speranza e il desiderio, il desiderio di un rinnovato incontro con la presenza divina. Il secondo canto dell'*Inferno*, infatti, prima di trovarsi di fronte la porta del "doloroso regno" (24.28) con la quale si apre il terzo canto, si chiude all'insegna del desiderio (2.136), come l'inizio del poema era stato caratterizzato dalla paura. Ed anche il desiderio della possibilità della vita dello spirito, come abbiamo sottolineato per il sentimento, per l'affetto della paura, viene percepito più intensamente nel cuore, che il solo luogo, per Dante e per le sue guide spirituali, dove il sentimento si imprime con una forza tale da spingere al movimento ed all'azione, da costringere il libero arbitrio alle decisioni più radicali e determinati, fin'anche ad attraversare l'orrore delle pene infernali: "tu m'hai con desiderio il *cor* disposto / sí al venir con le parole tue . . . / Or va, ch'un sol volere è d'ambidue" (2.135–39).<sup>40</sup>



La paura del senso è la prima che assale l'uomo nel "nuovo e mai non fatto cammino di questa vita" (*Conv.* 4.12 ). Nel momento stesso in cui ci si rende conto di avere un corpo e si diventa consapevoli della propria sensorialità, si percepisce anche la paura di un possibile male, dolore, di un danno corporale. La prima reazione a tale condizione è rifugiarsi in ciò che si oppone alla paura del senso, vale a dire nel piacere del senso.

Aristotele nell'*Etica* definisce la paura "as expectation of evil; now we fear all evils, e.g. disgrace, poverty, disease, friendlessness, death" (III, 115a, 10);<sup>41</sup> mentre il piacere è considerato una azione verso stati non paurosi e di conseguenza godibili; piacere come effetto del sentimento contrario ed opposto alla paura, vale a dire la speranza, come attesa di un bene. La speranza, come la paura, si delinea così legata a situazioni contingenti, perché l'attesa di un dolore o di un piacere si innesca ogni volta che sorge uno stato che si vuole evitare o accogliere.<sup>42</sup>

La paura come attesa di qualcosa di malvagio e negativo è anche la risposta che Beatrice dà a Virgilio nel secondo canto dell'*Inferno* quando il poeta romano le chiede perché ella stessa non guidi Dante fin da questa prima cantica: "Temer si dee di sole quelle cose / c'hanno potenza di fare altrui male; / de l'altre no, ché non son paürose" (88–90).<sup>43</sup> Beatrice risponde che ella è "fatta da Dio" (91), e quindi non è toccata né dalle pene e gli orrori dell'*Inferno*, né dalla "vostra miseria" (92), dalla miseria umana, legata alla tirannia sensoriale della paura e della speranza, del



dolore e del piacere, come un costante pendolo che oscilla da una parte e dall'altra.

Quali sono *quelle cose / c'hanno potenza di fare altrui male* e quali sono le altre cose *ché non son paurose*? Anche se Beatrice è ormai nella costante presenza divina, sembra considerare come solo veramente temibili, il male e la morte che proviene da fuori, dall'odio dei propri simili o dalle bestie feroci o da catastrofi naturali. Mentre ciò che non è pauroso sembra quella sorta di paura psicologica che domina tutto il secondo canto dell'*Inferno*; la paura che proviene non dall'esterno, ma dalla propria mente. Paura dell'incapacità stessa nell'intraprendere una impresa, un cammino giusto e santo, "fatto per proprio per l'umana spece" (*Par.* 1.55). Paura che la stessa presenza e saggezza divina non possa condurre alla salvezza, non operi giustamente; proprio questo dubbio blasfemo è possibile leggere nelle parole di Virgilio che osa chiedere a Beatrice del perché non guidi lei direttamente Dante (*Inf.* 2.81–84).

Il dubbio, la paura, la viltà, la confusione, l'ignoranza sono tutte condizioni psicologiche proprie dell'uomo dopo il peccato, derivate dalla privazione della presenza divina. Esse sono veramente paurose precisamente quando comincia ad emergere il desiderio divino e ci si rende conto quanto potere esercitino nell'assoggettare la mente alla schiavitù sensoriale. Si ha paura di se stessi; si ha paura di essere trascinati via e persi da una o l'altra fantasia, da una o l'altra attrazione sensuale, e si è trascinati così indietro, dove "il sol tace" (*Inf.* 1.60), verso ciò che Virgilio definisce quasi con disprezzo, "noia" (76), che significa pena, vizio, ignoranza nell'accezione antica del termine.

Beatrice è ormai lontana da tutto questo, mentre Virgilio, ma soprattutto Dante, sono ancora avvolti dalla grande disperazione dell'assenza dell'esperienza diretta del "sommo bene" (*Par.* 7.80), e presi costantemente dalla meschinità e pochezza dei propri pensieri, come si accorge Dante stesso: "E qual è quei che disvuol ciò che volle / e per novi pensier cangia proposta, / sí che dal cominciar tutto si tolle, / tal mi fec'io 'n quella oscura costa, / perché pensando, consumai la 'mpresa / che fu nel cominciar cotanto tosta" (*Inf.* 2.37–42). Virgilio più precisamente descrive come ombre queste paure del pellegrino: "come falso veder bestia quand'ombra" (48). Ingannati dal senso e dal mondo psicologico basato su di esso, ci si sbaglia facilmente nel considerare il destino e il fine stesso della vita umana. Così anche la reazione del pellegrino all'invito divino non è all'inizio di fiducia e di apertura, al contrario, è quella di interporre

tra lui stesso e la verità, ombre, che hanno una forma ben precisa in questo momento, vale a dire la condizione psicologica della viltà: “l’anima tua è da *viltade* offesa; / la quale molte fiate l’uomo ingombra / sí che d’onorata impresa lo rivolge” (46–47), oppure più avanti nello stesso canto: “dunque: che è? Perché, perché restai, / perché tanta *viltà* nel core allette” (121–22); paura e viltà che tolgono all’anima determinazione, “ardire e franchezza” (123).

La paura del senso si delinea già dai primi canti come una paura fisica e psicologica, la paura di ricevere un danno, di perdere violentemente la propria vita, e la paura che sorge dal proprio mondo psicologico particolare, condizionato dalla ricerca del piacere e dal timore del dolore. La prima condizione è considerata veramente paurosa da Beatrice, la seconda no, ma solo frutto di viltà ed ignoranza: paura delle ombre create dalla propria mente.

Il sentimento dell’insufficienza umana di fronte alla possibilità divina si delinea così come il vero impedimento al cammino spirituale. Una volta infatti che si considera come irraggiungibile e irrealizzabile il desiderio divino, si smette di credere in esso o lo si considera alla stregua di una immaginazione, mentre la speranza e il desiderio vengono spostati verso “l’amor de l’apparenza e ’l suo pensiero” (*Par.* 29.85–87), verso la molteplicità dei piaceri e dei beni sensuali come i soli veramente godibili ed alla portata delle possibilità umane. Si aprono così le porte del vizio o si arriva a negare Dio stesso, come per i peccatori dell’*Inferno*. Il pellegrino compirà il suo viaggio proprio per purificarsi da questa distorsione della volontà e della ragione; in cima al *Purgatorio*, sotto la pressante requisitoria di Beatrice, Dante confesserà, tra le lacrime, il suo peccato, che fu proprio quello di distogliersi dal desiderio divino per altri fini: “piangendo dissi: «le presenti cose / col falso lor piacer volser miei passi, / tosto che ’l vostro viso si nascose»” (*Purg.* 31.34–36). Una volta che la vita dello spirito comincia a rivelarsi, deve sembrare veramente terribile la propria vita nell’errore, al punto da soffrirne e piangerne per il rimorso.

Ciò che abbiamo chiamato paura psicologica, come abbiamo appena visto, se considerata nella giusta maniera, apre le porte al desiderio divino. La paura che il pellegrino sperimenta lungo tutto l’inferno ha il valore della “necessità” (*Inf.* 12.87), mentre la discesa agli inferi è considerata come l’unico modo per evitare la morte stessa, come spiega Virgilio a Catone (*Purg.* 1.58–63). Le pene infernali e i vizi del *Purgatorio* sono per Dante e per il lettore esempi di quello che può succedere se ci si piega al

peccato ed alle tendenze peccaminose, e bisogna vedere, avere “esperienza piena” (*Inf.* 28.46) di un mondo così corrotto perché il timore di poterne far parte spinga verso la via del bene.

Nell'*Inferno* tuttavia non domina solo la paura psicologica, ma soprattutto la paura fisica, questo costante pericolo di essere attaccati, di subire un male, un colpo che possa uccidere, o ferire a tal punto da lasciare nel terrore. Nonostante le rassicurazioni di Virgilio che il loro viaggio è deciso e guidato da Dio (*Inf.* 7.7 e 21.79–82), di fronte ai diavoli che lacerano dannati, di fronte ai mostri infernali, di fronte alla paura fisica non ci sono altri mezzi di opposizione che un'azione fisica, come la fuga precipitosa di fronte ai diavoli in malebolge (23.37–51). Il pellegrino sarà dominato da questo sentimento lungo tutto l'inferno; ogni cosa è spaventosa in questo primo regno, come lo è la paura di Dante stesso di non poterne uscire.

Leggere l'*Inferno* attraverso le parole di Beatrice sul sentimento della paura ci permette di apprezzare la meditazione di Dante sulla natura del male. I peccati più gravi sono quelli dei fraudolenti (*Inf.* 11.25) perché questi dannati hanno usato la loro vita per infliggere un danno, un male agli altri.<sup>44</sup> Gli ‘altri’ sono tutti coloro che hanno vissuto nella paura di questa “mal creata plebe” (32.13), che hanno subito gli effetti del tradimento, che sono stati derubati, sedotti, ingannati, umiliati, hanno subito ingiustizie. Dante ha sperimentato sulla sua pelle l'ingiustizia e il tradimento (*Par.* 17.55–69), e deve aver considerato profondamente questa condizione, questo vivere nel timore che il proprio simile possa compiere una azione dannosa, soprattutto quando si tratta di persone in posizioni di potere, come papi e re. I fraudolenti sono coloro infatti che non solo hanno usato la ragione per fare il male ma anche la forza e la costrizione. Di fronte a tali persone non c'è riparo dice Dante: “dove l'argomento de la mente / s'aggiunge al mal voler e a la possa, / nessun riparo vi può far la gente” (*Inf.* 31.55–57).<sup>45</sup> Gli effetti della malvagità possono essere devastanti quanto la morte fisica, possono far perdere la ragione e condurre alla follia, all'odio più profondo, come nel caso del Conte Ugolino, o condurre al suicidio, come per Pier delle Vigne. I diavoli infernali sono coloro incaricati di infliggere pene e tormenti ai dannati. Essi sono dei “gran divoratori di uomini,”<sup>46</sup> e possono anche entrare in possesso dell'anima di un vivo, “che poscia il governa” (*Inf.* 33.131), appena questo compie tradimento. L'immagine di Satana che maciulla i corpi dei grandi

traditori Giuda, Cassio e Bruto, se rappresenta la giusta colpa per un peccato così grande, infonde una paura senza pari, sembra di sentire sulla propria stessa carne le zanne dei demoni, si rimane come sospesi tra la vita e la morte: “io non morii e non rimasi vivo” (34.25). Così come torna la paura della morte di fronte ai giganti: “allor temett’io più che mai la morte” (31.109). Oppure quel gelo paralizzante che assale il pellegrino di fronte alle trasformazioni infernali causate dall’assalto dei serpenti (24.81–84). Nell’*Inferno* tutti i più oscuri e profondi incubi sembrano trovar forma, primo tra tutti la paura della morte, quella paura con la quale Dante inizia il suo poema: “esta selva selvaggia aspra e forte / che nel pensier rinova la paura! / Tant’è amara che poco è più morte” (*Inf.* 1.5–7).<sup>47</sup>

Si vorrebbe poter rinchiudere tutti i mali del mondo in una fossa e chiuderla per sempre e bloccarne l’entrata. Questa deve essere stata l’idea e la speranza di Dante nello scrivere l’*Inferno*. Un modo per liberarsi dal male, relegarlo in un profondo buco, renderlo inoffensivo. Subire un male è veramente ciò di cui bisogna avere maggiormente paura, ciò da cui si vorrebbe sempre stare lontani; “conviensi dipartir da tanto male” (34.84) sono le parole di Virgilio a Dante nell’ultimo canto dell’*Inferno*.<sup>48</sup> Il male offende ed impedisce la libertà, la stessa dignità di uomo viene degradata; in tali condizioni è difficile vivere ed ancora più difficile seguire il desiderio divino, sperare in una vita dello spirito.



Nei *Proverbi* si legge che “il timore è fonte di vita, per evitare i lacci della morte” (14:27); mentre per San Tommaso: “the fear of God is compared to a man’s whole life that is ruled by God’s wisdom, as the root to the tree.”<sup>49</sup> Siamo di fronte ad un sentimento che è l’opposto della paura del senso: se infatti la paura del senso fa vivere nella costante minaccia di un dolore e di un danno fisico, nella possibilità della morte, lo stesso sentimento quando è rivolto a Dio conduce a superare la morte stessa, apre le porte della grazia. Le parole di San Paolo nella *Seconda Lettera ai Corinzi* sono illuminanti sul valore del timore di Dio opposto alla paura del senso: “La tristezza secondo Dio produce un pentimento irrevocabile che porta alla salvezza, mentre la tristezza del mondo produce la morte. Ecco, infatti, quanta sollecitudine ha prodotto in voi proprio questo rattristarvi secondo Dio; anzi quante scuse, quanta indignazione, quale timore, quale desiderio, quale affetto, quale punizione” (7:10–12). Gli inizi del viaggio dantesco, come abbiamo visto, sono caratterizzati da queste due paure che si

oppongono a vicenda. Da una parte la paura delle bestie e dell'oscurità della foresta, dall'altra il timore di fronte alla possibilità della via dello spirito, il sentirsi inadeguato e insufficiente all'invito divino. La paura dell'aggressione degli animali viene superata da un riorientare questo sentimento verso il cammino spirituale, in tal modo si aprono le porte del desiderio e della speranza invece di quelle della disperazione e dello smarrimento.

Il timore di Dio è un sentimento complesso che ha uno specifico campo d'azione nella progressione spirituale e fa parte dei sette doni dello spirito santo (sapienza, intelligenza, consiglio, forza, scienza, pietà e timore di Dio),<sup>50</sup> anzi ne è il fondamento come dice San Tommaso: "fear is chiefly required as being the foundation, so to speak, of the perfection of the other gifts."<sup>51</sup> I doni rappresentano la presenza divina nell'uomo, appartengono all'ordine soprannaturale e sono spirati, 'soffiati' dallo spirito santo nell'uomo.<sup>52</sup> Tradizionalmente venivano divisi in due gruppi: "four belong to the reason, namely wisdom, science, understanding and counsel, and three to the appetite, namely fortitude, piety and fear."<sup>53</sup> I doni vengono considerati come effetti delle virtù teologali, come grazia operante, si instaurano come disposizioni permanenti nella vita individuale, come abiti delle facoltà dell'anima.<sup>54</sup> Marie-Michel Philippon, seguendo San Tommaso,<sup>55</sup> parla dei doni come di nuovi istinti, di istinti divini che ubbidiscono quindi alle leggi divine e non a quelle naturali.<sup>56</sup> L'uomo di conseguenza è reso deiforme dall'azione dei doni: "l'âme, élevée au niveau de Dieu, rendue véritablement déiforme dans son être, est désormais capable de saisir Dieu directement dans son Essence Incréée."<sup>57</sup> La teologia dei doni introduce il lato più propriamente mistico ed esperienziale della religione cristiana: quella presenza divina immessa da Dio nel "cerebro" (*Purg.* 25.69) dell'embrione umano, rivelata poi come contenuto intellettuale, come una presenza immortale avulsa dalla logica delle "cose nove" (*Par.* 7.72), si espande fino a coinvolgere tutto l'essere umano, a riordinare le stesse facoltà dell'anima piene ora della presenza divina e non più soggette alla sola tirannia della sensorialità.<sup>58</sup>

Nella *Commedia* i sette doni dello spirito santo aprono la processione mistica nel paradiso terrestre; Dante li immagina come sette candelabri (*Purg.* 29.50) alla guida della grande rappresentazione sacra che simboleggia l'attualizzazione della chiesa in terra (43–150).<sup>59</sup> Proprio nel paradiso terrestre, come abbiamo accennato sopra, il pellegrino comincia a sperimentare i piaceri divini, e il primo canto del *Paradiso* si aprirà esattamente

con la chiara coscienza di essere entrato in un ordine diverso, in un ordine divino: l'esperienza del "trasumanar" (1.70) è quella dell'essere stato reso deiforme dai doni come effetto della grazia.

Tra i doni dello spirito santo il timore di Dio, abbiamo detto, occupa un posto particolare. Esso appare all'inizio del cammino spirituale come causa principale dell'amore di Dio perché rileva una inquietudine profonda, un disagio della volontà di non poter gioire di quello che si spera e si ama. Il timore di Dio, dice San Tommaso, è l'inizio e la radice della sapienza non riguardo all'essenza dello spirito santo nell'uomo, che è la fede, ma ai suoi effetti: "but as regards the effect, the beginning of wisdom is the point where wisdom begins to work, and in this way fear is the beginning of wisdom, yet servile fear in one way, and filial fear, in another."<sup>60</sup> La percezione del timore di Dio segna il passaggio dalla presenza divina come ordine razionale, a quella affettivo-volitiva. Il timore di Dio è quindi l'inizio della saggezza in un senso veramente pregnante perché fa sentire la sua azione nella sfera affettiva, ed apre così la possibilità e la speranza all'esperienza diretta dello spirito.

San Tommaso, nel passaggio dalla *Summa* che abbiamo appena citato, introduce una distinzione importante nel modo di agire del timore di Dio, quella tra timore servile e filiale. Il primo sentimento riguarda la relazione con il divino dei principianti, di coloro che si avvicinano per la prima volta al cammino spirituale. In questo caso si stabilisce un rapporto servile con Dio perché l'avvicinarsi a Lui è determinato dal timore di un castigo, di una pena: come amare la giustizia non per se stessa, per l'ordine e la pace che rappresenta, ma per paura di essere puniti se la si trasgredisce. Il timore filiale invece si instaura quando la relazione con Dio diventa più intima e personale, di esso è detto che apre le porte alla carità.<sup>61</sup> Per descrivere questo secondo modo di temere il Signore l'esempio del rapporto tra figli e genitori sembra esprimere meglio di tutti le qualità e la profondità di questa unione. Il timore filiale è in verità un atto d'amore e di consuetudine con chi si ama, esso si basa proprio su una conoscenza intima che stabilisce una relazione di rispetto, ammirazione, reverenza, amore, amicizia. Questa nuova relazione tra l'uomo e Dio viene descritta nelle *Sacre Scritture* come il diventare figli di Dio: "voi non avete ricevuto uno spirito da schiavi per ricadere nella paura, ma avete ricevuto uno spirito da figli adottivi."<sup>62</sup> Il vero timore che esiste in una tale relazione è quello di perdere l'altro, di essere abbandonati. Il passaggio dal timore

servile a quello filiale è di conseguenza una conversione dall'amore proprio all'amore puro, dall'attaccamento al proprio mondo psicologico particolare all'apertura, alla partecipazione ed all'unione di se stessi con la presenza divina.<sup>63</sup>

Il timore di Dio, come scrive Riccardo di San Vittore, è un sentimento talmente fondamentale che senza di esso non ci si può liberare da nessun peccato.<sup>64</sup> I primi versi che ritraggono le anime dei dannati nell'*Inferno* dantesco le rappresentano "lasse e nude" (3.100), ma subito dopo la prima connotazione psicologica che Dante gli attribuisce è proprio quella di coloro che non temono Dio: "Poi [le anime] si ritrasser tutte quante insieme / forte piangendo, a la riva malvagia / ch'attende ciascun uom che Dio non teme" (106–8).<sup>65</sup> Il viaggio del pellegrino della *Commedia* verso Dio, come ogni vero e sincero cammino spirituale, nasce all'insegna della paura e del timore di Dio. Abbiamo sottolineato poco sopra la distinzione tra paura del senso e timore di Dio, mentre ora vorrei evidenziare il movimento interno di questo dono dello Spirito Santo nella crescita spirituale del pellegrino, il passaggio dalla paura servile a quella filiale, e l'apertura alla carità.

L'*Inferno* per Dante è paura di un luogo senza ritorno, il rischio di rimanere intrappolati nelle molteplici tentazioni dei peccati e nella malignità dei diavoli. La presenza divina in questo primo regno è solamente giustizia, pena e castigo, come tuonano le parole scritte sulla porta dell'*Inferno* (3.1–9). La meraviglia piena di terrore di fronte alle forme della pena è costante nel viaggio infernale, come lo è il timore di poterne far parte. Nel quattordicesimo canto per esempio, nel quale "si vede di giustiza orribil arte" (6), dove vengono puniti i violenti contro Dio in un sabbione rovente sotto una pioggia di fuoco: "O vendetta di Dio, quanto tu dei / essere temuta da ciascun che legge / ciò che fu manifesto a li occhi miei" (16–18). Nell'*Inferno* ci sono coloro che bestemmiano Dio, quelli che hanno rifiutato e disprezzato la vita dello spirito, ed anche da morti, in attesa di essere traghettati sull'altra sponda dell'Acheronte, i dannati vengono ritratti: "bestemmia[ndo] Dio e lor parenti / l'umana spezie e 'l loco e il seme / di lor semenza e di lor nascimenti" (103–5). Forse non c'è in tutto l'*Inferno* un esempio più straordinario e terribile della punizione divina come nel canto venticinquesimo dove assistiamo alla trasformazione dei dannati in serpenti. Il canto si apre con l'invettiva di Vanni Fucci contro Dio (3), che immediatamente è assilito da serpenti che lo avvolgono e lo stritolano (4–9), mentre più avanti nel canto e la

volta di altri dannati essere aggrediti dai serpenti che entrano nei corpi storpiando e trasformando la figura umana in quella di rettili (46–141).

Lo spavento che assale il pellegrino in questo primo regno è quello di chi teme la morte nel peccato. Virgilio dirà a Catone nel primo canto del *Purgatorio* che l'unico modo per salvare Dante da tale morte era mostrargli le anime dannate (62–63); ma anche nell'*Inferno* Virgilio ritorna più volte sulla necessità del viaggio infernale, di cosa significhi consumare una vita lontani dalla ricerca divina.<sup>66</sup> Questo modo di relazionarsi a Dio, attraverso un rapporto di sottomissione servile perché condizionato dal timore di una punizione e da una costante attenzione a non trasgredire norme e leggi, per non perdersi, come le anime che Dante incontra lungo il cammino, sono gli aspetti che caratterizzano la paura servile. La paura servile fornisce al pellegrino la determinazione giusta per poter intraprendere la via del bene, fa toccare con mano la realtà terribile del peccato e della perdizione, spinge verso una relazione amorosa con il fine del proprio desiderio: non più timore di una punizione, ma timore di una separazione, di essere abbandonati, di perdere una vicinanza che si sente come fondamentale e vitale.

Ancora in cima al paradiso terrestre il pellegrino è preso da “confusione e paura insieme” (*Purg.* 31.13) sotto le accuse dirette di Beatrice. Beatrice appare come un Dio che viene a punire le colpe di chi lo ha tradito. Siamo nella parte più intima e dolorosa della vicenda esistenziale del Dante della *Commedia*: se fin'ora sono stati sempre i peccati degli altri ad essere raccontati, ascoltati e giudicati, ora è la volta di Dante di dover raccontare il proprio peccato, di dover essere ascoltato e giudicato. Ci viene detto precisamente quando il desiderio di Dante si lasciò deviare dal suo fine divino, verso il peccato, verso il miraggio di felicità ingannevoli (*Purg.* 30.124–32). La “vergogna” (31.43 e 33.31), la paura, la confusione sono le condizioni psicologiche di fronte alle accuse di Beatrice. Eppure il pentimento di Dante e il perdono di colei che si è amata tanto, instaurano immediatamente una nuova relazione tra i due protagonisti. Il pellegrino è invaso da un senso illimitato di riconoscenza: “di penter sí mi punse ivi l'ortica, / che di tutte altre cose qual mi torse / piú nel suo amor, piú mi si fè nemica. / Tanta riconoscenza il cor mi morse, / ch'io caddi vinto” (31.85–89). Beatrice diventa l'unico oggetto del proprio amore e si è completamente in esso con tutta la propria persona, al punto che ogni altra cosa è considerata come nemica. Dal canto suo Beatrice accoglie Dante con un rinnovato amore; nell'ultimo canto del *Purgatorio* lo invita



a camminare al suo fianco (19–21) e gli dice espressamente di liberarsi da ogni timore o paura, come di stati d'animo ormai da superare: “da tema e da vergogna / voglio che omai ti disviluppe, / sí che non parli piú com'om che sogna” (31–33).

D'ora in avanti i due protagonisti procederanno sempre insieme, e la loro vicinanza permetterà di conoscersi più profondamente e soprattutto di condividere le esperienze di paradiso. Non c'è niente di più intimo e forte nell'unire due persone che condividere esperienze tanto desiderate e sentite come fondamentali in una vita. Come abbiamo detto il timore di Dio apre le porte alla fruizione di Dio, e per tale fruizione la vicinanza con l'oggetto del proprio amore è imprescindibile. Si instaurano nuovi vincoli basati su un comune percepire e sentire, sullo scambio stesso di percezioni e non più solo di pensieri e idee. La relazione tra Dante e Beatrice sarà sempre in un rapporto di maestro e discepolo, ma in un senso veramente profondo in cui il maestro vuole che il discepolo sperimenti quello che lui sperimenta, e il discepolo dal canto suo non stacca mai gli occhi e tutta la sua attenzione dalla fonte stessa che è il mezzo per l'esperienza desiderata. Nel primo canto del *Paradiso* assistiamo proprio all'inizio di questo modo così penetrante di vivere il rinnovato incontro: Beatrice ha lo sguardo fisso “ne l'etterne rote” (64), ed il pellegrino solo guardandola riesce a vedere quello che Lei vede, può percepire attraverso di Lei il divino che altrimenti gli sarebbe ancora impedito: “nel suo aspetto tal dentro mi fei, / qual sí fe Glauco nel gustar de l'erba / che 'l fè consorto in mar de li altri dèi” (67–69). L'esperienza è talmente intensa e coinvolgente che non ci sono altri modi per descriverla che l'esempio di una trasformazione, il sentirsi invaso dal divino, diventare simile a un Dio come per Glauco.<sup>67</sup>

Si aprono così le porte all'amore perché il timore di Dio nasce dall'amore<sup>68</sup>. Lungo tutto il *Paradiso* il pellegrino sarà sempre con Beatrice, seguendo i suoi passi, cercando il suo assenso ad ogni invito delle anime ad un colloquio o quando egli stesso vuole rivolgere una domanda o avere un chiarimento. Alle volte Beatrice si rivolge a Dante come ad un figlio bisognoso d'aiuto (*Par.* 22.1–10), ma più spesso è il pellegrino che vuole la sua vicinanza, che sente di non potergli stare lontano. Un sorriso di lei può dare la felicità più intensa (7.18). Oppure nel canto trentesimo, ormai nell'Empireo, la bellezza di Beatrice gli si presenta senza pari: “la bellezza ch'io vidi si trasmonda / non pur di là da noi, ma certo io credo / che solo il suo fattor tutta la goda” (19–21); ancora un esempio che va oltre

la misura, oltre la misura della descrizione, di ogni paragone umano o angelico, al punto che solo Dio stesso può gioire di tanta bellezza. Perché solo la vicinanza, la consuetudine, la voglia di conoscere ed esperire può condurre il pellegrino ad una partecipazione di sentire con chi è già spiritualmente dove si desidera con tutto se stessi arrivare e trovar quiete; ad una partecipazione che va oltre le possibilità di descriverla perfettamente proprio perché l'intensità dell'incontro e del contatto lascia fuori ogni forma oggettiva e segnica di espressione, mentre si appella solo all'esperienza soggettiva e affettiva.

Il grado di maturità spirituale del pellegrino è a questo punto così avanzato che il paradiso gli si rivela in maniera sempre più diretta e non solo attraverso Beatrice. La paura filiale, quel rispetto, reverenza e profondo ringraziamento per una presenza e guida costante si trasformano in carità, la forma dell'amore più perfetto, quando si arriva ad avere e vivere le stesse esperienze di colei che si è scelta come via stessa verso Dio. Nel canto trentunesimo, quando Beatrice è ormai ritornata al suo scanno tra le schiere celesti e San Bernardo ha preso il suo posto, il pellegrino rivolge alla sua amata il ringraziamento più preciso del suo aiuto e tirocinio spirituale: "tu m'hai di *servo* tratto a libertade / per tutte quelle vie, per tutt' i modi / che di ciò fare avrei la potestade" (*Par.* 31.85–87).<sup>69</sup> Liberarsi dalla servitù una volta che ci si riconosce soggetti ad essa: schiavi della dipendenza sensoriale e delle cose soggette a corruzione e distruzione, schiavi della stessa paura servile che fa vivere nella costante minaccia di una punizione. Il ringraziamento verso chi è stato l'artefice e la fonte dell'emancipazione spirituale deve essere illimitato, senza tale aiuto si sarebbe morti senza aver potuto soddisfare il desiderio divino.

*Pontifical Institute, University of Toronto*  
*Toronto, Ontario, Canada*

## NOTE

1. Il sentimento della paura, o timore di Dio, come inizio della saggezza e della relazione tra l'uomo e Dio ritorna spesso nelle *Sacre Scritture*. Vedi Alexander Cruden, *Crudens Complete Concordance to the Old and New Testament* (London: World Bible Publishers, 1984), 209–11.

2. "Sanctum facit affectio santa, et ipsa gemina: timor Domini sanctus et sancut amor" (San Bernardo, *De consideratione* 5.30).

3. San Tommaso, *ST*, I–II, q. 68, a. 7.

4. Léonard Augustin, "Expérience spirituelle," *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique: doctrine et histoire*, vol. 17, publié sous la direction de Marcel Viller; assisté de F. Cavallera et J. de Guibert (Paris: Beauchesne, 1932); vol. 4, part. 2 (2004).

5. Il concetto di anima in Dante riflette la complessità che questo termine aveva nel Medioevo. Soprattutto grazie all'influsso della psicologia aristotelica, la scolastica e la mistica cristiana stessa si trovarono a fare i conti con un concetto di anima basato su basi naturali e filosofiche. L'anima è così "la forma del corpo vivente" [Roberto Grasso and Marcello Zanatta, *La Forma del Corpo Vivente* (Milano: Unicoli, 2005), 86], che si struttura e genera sotto l'effluvio di leggi naturali e non divine, come insegnava Aristotele nel *De Anima*, e come ripete Dante nel *Convivio* (3.6) e nella *Commedia* (*Inf.* 27.73–74). Secondo lo Stagirita l'anima è costituita da tre potenze o facoltà principali: quella del senso, dell'immaginazione e dell'intelletto; ed è l'interrelazione tra queste tre potenze che dà forma a ciò che si definisce anima, dando origine al conoscere umano stesso. Dante si riferisce a questo processo generativo la conoscenza stessa nel *Purgatorio* 17.13–18 e nel *Paradiso* 24.7–9. Ancora ad Aristotele (*De Partibus animalium*, 686b–90b) Dante pensa quando descrive la formazione dell'anima umana nella sua catena evolutiva embrionale che inizia dall'anima vegetativa, passa poi all'anima sensitiva ed infine all'anima intellettuale (*Conv.* 3.2, 4.21 e *Purg.* 25.36–57). Ma accanto a questa nuova e rivoluzionaria interpretazione, il Medioevo conosceva la concezione cristiana dell'anima come parte spirituale e incorruttibile dell'uomo, infusa direttamente da Dio, capace di atti meritevoli o di colpe, e per questo destinata al premio o al castigo, e a sopravvivere alla morte corporale (*Purg.* 25.61–108, *Par.* 7.139–48). La psicologia aristotelica influenzò la stessa mistica cristiana, nella sua forma più propriamente esperienziale, vale a dire nella dottrina dei sensi spirituali. Nel suo erudito libro sulla tradizione dei sensi spirituali nel medioevo e principalmente in San Bonaventura, Fabio Massimo Tedoldi spiega nel seguente modo la sorte del *De Anima* all'interno dell'elaborazione della dottrina dei cinque sensi spirituali: "all'antica tripartizione delle potenze dell'anima ispirata a Platone —assimilata dai Padri nel corso dei secoli e, dunque, consegnata col sigillo delle *Auctoritates* come dottrina comune ai maestri medievali—subentra in modo vigoroso il contributo della concezione psicologica di Aristotele mediato dalle tradizioni e dalle interpretazioni di Avicenna e di Averroè. Ora, le differenti sensibilità dei maestri, filosofi e teologi hanno variamente miscelato i molteplici elementi, non di rado contraddittori, compilando *Tractatus*, *Summae*, *Lecturae*, *Libri* . . . i quali, nel fotografare il sopraggiungere di nuove istanze prontamente assimilate, divenivano oggetto di continui e nuovi rimaneggiamenti da parte delle successive generazioni di maestri. Ciò che a noi interessa osservare in questa prolifica produzione di testi sono i frutti che la concezione psicologica aristotelica ha prodotto nella riflessione sull'anima: le implicazioni a riguardo della gneoseologia teologica, anzitutto, e conseguentemente il ruolo dei sensi spirituali e le connessioni dell'anima col corpo" (*La dottrina dei cinque sensi spirituali in San Bonaventura* [Roma: Antonianum, 1999], 97–98).

6. La traccia dell'esperienza del divino come 'dolce' è un tipico della letteratura mistica, e soprattutto della guida spirituale per eccellenza di Dante nella *Commedia*, San Bernardo: "O amor sanctus et castus! o dulcis et suavis affectio! o pura et defaecata intentio voluntatis! eo certe defaecator et purior, quo in ea de proprio nil jam admistum relinquitur: eo suavior et dulcior, quo totum divinum est quod sentitur. Sic affici, deificari est" (*De diligendo Deo* 10.28). L'unione con il divino è dolce e piacevole perché è percepita nel corpo: "Dilexit autem dulciter, sapienter, fortiter. Dulce semper dixerim, quod carnem induit; cautum, quod culpam cavet; forte, quod mortem sustinuit. Nam quos sane in carne visitavit, carnaliter tamen nequaquam amavit, sed in prudentia spiritus" (San Bernardo, *Sermones super cantica canticorum* 20.2). Anche San Tommaso descrive la consapevolezza della presenza della grazia come l'esperienza di una dolcezza: "Tertio modo cognoscitur aliquid coniecturaliter per aliqua signa. Et hoc modo aliquis cognoscere potest se habere gratiam, in quantum scilicet percipit se delectari in Deo, et contemnere res mundanas; et in quantum homo non est conscius sibi alicuius peccati mortalis. Secundum quem modum potest intelligi quod habetur Apoc. II, *vincenti dabo manna absconditum, quod nemo novit nisi qui accipit*, quia scilicet ille qui accipit, per quandam experientiam dulcedinis novit, quam non experitur ille qui non accipit" (*STI-II*, q. 112, a. 5).

7. "Est igitur considerandum quod dilectio est actus voluntaris, quae his significatur per cor: nam sicut cor corporale est principium omnium corporalium motuum, ita etiam voluntas, et maxime

quantum ad intentionem finis ultimi, quod est objectum caritatis, est principium omnium spiritualium motuum” (ST II-II, q. 44, a. 5). Romano Guardini accenna alla dottrina del cuore nelle sue considerazioni sulla presenza del corpo e della corporeità nella *Commedia*: “Con ciò raggiungiamo la zona più profonda della filosofia di Dante, cioè la sua dottrina del «cuore». L’accezione dantesca di questo termine non ha niente a che vedere con il concetto moderno di sentimento. Il «cuore» ha qui il rigore dello spirito e la ricchezza di possibilità della materia. In esso lo spirito e la materia si incontrano, ma a vicenda amici e fecondi, così che il puro spirito diventa «anima» e il semplice corpo fisico «corpo umano». Nel cuore nasce l’uomo” (*Studi su Dante*, tr. M.L. Maraschini and A. Sacchi Balestrieri [Brescia: Morcelliana, 1986], 232–33).

8. Nell’uso biblico l’anima è considerata come espressione dei contenuti sensibili e intellettuali mentre il cuore è il luogo dove agisce esclusivamente Dio (ma anche il peccato): “on voit que dans le domaine des sentiments l’âme se contente de subir et d’éprouver, tandis que le coeur réagit déjà et laisse entrevoir l’intervention de la volonté. Si on passe au domaine de l’activité spirituelle, l’âme ne joue plus aucun rôle. La mémoire et l’imagination appartiennent déjà au coeur exclusivement, même dans le rêve: je dors, mais mon coeur veille. C’est le coeur, jamais l’âme, qui réfléchit, qui forme des projets, qui prend des résolutions, et il s’échauffe à ce travail. C’est aussi le coeur qui prend des décisions et responsabilités. On voit quel rôle central joue le coeur dans la vie spirituelle; c’est celui de la conscience psychologique et morale” (Antoine Guillaumont, et al., “Cor et Cordis Affectus,” *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, vol. 2, parte 2, 2279). Così si esprime San Tommaso sulla relazione tra Dio e il cuore umano: “Ad quantum dicendum quod ad Deum non acceditur passibus corporalibus cum ubique sit, sed affectibus mentis, et eodem modo ab eo receditur. Et sic accessus et recessus sub similitudine localis motus designant spiritualem affectum” ST I, q. 3, a. 1.

9. Heather Webb, *The Medieval Heart* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2010), 22.

10. San Tommaso, ST II-II, q. 2, a. 4.

11. San Bernardo, *De consideratione* 2.3.

12. San Bernardo, *Sermones* 46.5.

13. San Bernardo, *Sermones* 22.2.

14. Uno studio sul significato del termine ‘esperienza’ in Dante è ancora da venire. Hans Urs Von Balthasar nei suoi studi sul poeta italiano accenna ai vari significati di esperienza in Dante: “Questo parola ‘esperienza’ ritorna frequentemente, cambiando senso, tra quello antico della mistica esperienza di Dio, a quello ancora più antico, risalente a Sant’Ireneo di Lione, dell’esperienza della grazia fatta attraverso l’esperienza corporale del suo contrario e quello fresco e moderno dello studio sperimentale della realtà” (*Dante*, tr. Giuseppe Magagna [Brescia: Morcelliana, 1973], 10).

15. I termini *affectus* ed *affectiones* hanno un significato complesso nella spiritualità medievale, e soprattutto in San Bernardo, che è considerato il maestro della spiritualità affettiva. Etienne Gilson, nel suo studio classico sulla teologia mistica di San Bernardo, sottolinea la differenza tra *affectus* e *affectiones*: “*Affectus*: one of the four fundamental emotions out of which all the other are composed. These are: *amor*, *timor*, *gaudium* and *tristitia* . . . *Affectiones*: the various affections of the soul relating to God. They are five in number, each determining a distinct relation of man to God. *Timor*, states of *servus*. *Spes*, states of *mercenarius*. *Obedientia*, states of *discipulus*. *Honor*, states of *filius*. *Amor*, states of *sponsa*. The affections, taken in true sense, are complex emotions made up of the various fundamental *affectus*. However, St. Bernard often enough uses *affectiones* in the sense of *affectus*” (*Mystical Theology of St. Bernard*, tr. A.H.C. Downes [London: Sheed & Ward, 1940], 101). Nel suo commento al *De diligendo Deo* Emero Stieglman spiega come il termine affetto in San Bernardo ha una vasta applicazione, fino a significare il movimento di tutta l’anima verso l’oggetto del suo desiderio, inoltre il critico lega il significato di affetto a quello di sapienza: “Bernard’s *affectio*, or *affectus* is not essentially ‘affection’ nor ‘attraction’ (not the ‘natural passion’ of our translation), though it does not exclude these meaning; all operations of the psyche —cognitive, volitional, and affective— are predicated of the whole human subject. While distinguishing the functions of the intellect and will, even in contemplative experience, Bernard insists upon the unity of the soul. One finds expressions in his work such *affectus animi*, *affectus mentis*, and *affectio in voluntate est* . . . The spirituality of *affectio* is no warrant for excluding the influence of human embodiment. The principal benefit the abbot seeks in dwelling on love as *affectio* is the experiential character the word suggests. He gives the readers no complex of

theories about love, like a thinker subjecting an object to speculative inquiry; he gives a description of what he undergoes in his life and of what his readers may observe in their own heart. 'Instruction makes one learned', he reminds us, while *affectio* makes one 'wise' (SC 23:14). Such wisdom (*sapientia*) is a direct contact with the object of knowledge (*sapor* means taste). It is receptive of what lies outside our free control . . . The superior value of that *sapientia* which is reached in *affectio* is the wholeness of its knowing, its engagement of all dimension of the subject, the partial recovery, therefore, of those aspects of our native freedom lost in sin" (Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God*, tr. Emero Stiegman [Kalamazoo Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1973], 94). Sulla stessa linea di Stiegman, Pacificus Delfgauw sottolinea la complessità del termine affetto in San Bernardo, ma più precisamente ne evidenzia due aspetti da tenere a mente. Da una parte il rischio di ridurre il movimento affettivo alla sola sensibilità, come già accadeva nella scolastica: "la tradition platonisante (alla quale San Bernardo faceva parte e che lo collega direttamente ai Padri della Chiesa) concevait la structure de l'âme tout autrement que la scolastique qui nous est familière. Elle ne séparait pas, d'une part, intelligence et volonté ressortissant à l'âme, et, d'autre part, les *affectus* ressortissant aux sens (séparation qui allait conduire la théologie scolastique à considerer ces *affectus* comme quantité négligeable). Les anciens avaient une vue profonde de l'unité originelle de l'être spirituel de l'homme. Pour eux, intelligence, volonté, *affectus* ne devenaient jamais des 'puissances' au sens de l'Ecole. C'était plutôt des aspects de l'unique dynamisme qu'est l'âme par nature, esprit créé, en perpétuel mouvement de retour vers son Principe" (*Saint Bernard, maître de l'amour divin* [Paris: FAC-éditions, 2004], 77). Dall'altra la necessità di considerare la teologia di San Bernardo in relazione alle sue fonti patristiche, per le quali era sempre l'uomo nella sua complessità ad essere posto in relazione a Dio, e non una o l'altra delle sue facoltà: "Si les mots *affectio* ou *affectus* (les deux s'emploient indifféremment) se rencontrent fréquemment chez saint Bernard, et les cisterciens en général, n'oublions cependant jamais que leur concept est profondément enraciné dans l'anthropologie patristique. Ainsi les Pères parlent-ils déjà de la *bienheureuse passion de la sainte charité*. L'*affectus* bernardin continue cette tradition, et il faut bien se garder de le confondre avec l'*affectus* scolastique ou l'*affectus cordis* d'une spiritualité postérieure . . . C'est pourquoi j'ai renoncé à traduire ce mot—les terms sentiment, affection, *Gefühl*, évoquant exclusivement un mouvement de la sensibilité, risquent d'en fausser la vraie signification. Pour Saint Bernard, comme dans la tradition patristique, les *affectus* sont des mouvements de l'âme, en premier lieu de la volonté; et donc, à l'état de nature intégrale, ils sont d'ordre proprement spirituel. L'Abbé de Clairvaux connaît certes, des *affectus carnales*, mais c'est là plutôt une dévaluation de leur caractère spirituel, une faiblesse consécutive à l'attachement à un objet sensible. (Rappelons que, dans son spiritualisme, le sensible n'a jamais de valeur définitive.) Étant d'ordre spirituel, les *affectus* se rencontrent également chez les Anges, chez Dieu lui-même, et saint Bernard ose même traduire le Dieu-Charité de saint Jean par: *Deus affectio est*" (Delfgauw, *Saint Bernard*, 76). Per l'uso del termine affetto vedi anche San Bonaventura nell'*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, IV 4,5, e San Tommaso nella *ST I*, q. 3, a. 1.

16. "Quod carnalis omnis necessitudo sit defutura, carnisque amor amore spiritus absorbendus; et infirmæ, quæ nunc sunt, humanæ affectiones in divinas quasdam habeant commutari" (San Bernardo, *De diligendo Deo* 15.40).

17. Il significato della presenza di San Bernardo negli ultimi canti della *Commedia* ha una lunga tradizione critica. Come dimostra Steven Botterill, San Bernardo era rappresentato al tempo di Dante come il simbolo stesso, non solo della possibilità dell'esperienza mistica, ma anche come riformatore della chiesa e grande oratore. Dante deve aver considerato San Bernardo un modello ed un esempio per il proprio cammino spirituale ed esistenziale, vale a dire di una fede veramente incarnata nella storia, che non si isola e separa dal mondo, ma cerca e trova l'esperienza del divino come mezzo per un rinnovamento generale della società. Vedi Steven Botterill, *Dante and the Mystical Tradition. Bernard of Clairvaux in the Commedia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 119–48.

18. In questi versi del *Paradiso* Dante fa ancora riferimento alla parola cuore. San Bernardo chiede al pellegrino uno sforzo ed una attenzione particolari nell'appressarsi all'esperienza divina, quella cioè di legarsi alle sue parole con il cuore, affinché gli insegnamenti del santo vengano accolti come espressione stessa del sentire. La partecipazione del discepolo all'esperienza dovrà infatti essere tale da trasformare direttamente le parole della sua guida in altrettanti moti dell'animo, e non solamente in ricezione oggettiva di un discorso. Il cuore, abbiamo già accennato, è la sede della volontà e della

vita spirituale, è il luogo dove la grazia (ma anche il peccato) si rendono sensibili e corporali, diventano azioni. Sprattutto nel XII secolo il termine cuore si trova spesso associato con il termine affetto, nell'espressione *affectus cordis*, in San Bernardo per esempio: "amor quidem cordis ad zelum quandam pertinere affectionis" (*Sermones* 20.3), rafforzando ancora di più il ruolo primario della via affettiva nella ricerca divina. Il cuore viene ad assumere un significato così centrale da inglobare la multiforme attività dell'anima, proprio perché nella sua primaria funzione volontaristica ha bisogno dell'intervento dell'intelligenza, dell'immaginazione, della memoria. Tuttavia essere trascinati e condotti dal cuore verso l'oggetto del proprio desiderio trasforma le attività intellettuali stesse in puri mezzi per il godimento e la consumazione—godimento e consumazione che sono le sole cose che interessano l'opera del cuore.

19. Ancora Beatrice fa appello all'affezione del pellegrino nell'invocare grazie alle anime del *Paradiso*: "se per grazia di Dio questi preliba / di quel che cade de la vostra mensa, / prima che morte tempo li prescriba, / ponete mente a l'affezione immensa / e roratelo alquanto: voi bevete / sempre del fonte onde vien quel ch'ei pensa" (24.4–9).

20. Non si può non pensare qui all'intuizione di T.S. Eliot sulla poesia dantesca come capace di educare i sensi: "Dante has to educate our senses as he goes along. The insistence throughout is upon states of feeling; the reasoning takes only its proper place as a means of reaching these states" (*Dante* [London: Faber & Faber, 1979], 52).

21. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: a Theological Aesthetics*, tr. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, 7 vols., ed. Joseph Fessio and John Riches (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982), 268.

22. Dante era convinto dell'unità dell'anima umana, seguendo l'autorità di San Tommaso (*ST I*, q. 76, a. 3), come ripete nella *Commedia* (*Purg.* 4.1–6; 25.34–75), ma anche nel *Convivio* (3.11); contro chi considerava che nell'uomo un'anima si sovrapponesse alle altre, come per la dottrina platonica delle tre anime: vegetativa, sensitiva e intellettuale, o per quella manichea che considerava invece due anime, la sensitiva e la razionale come presenti nel corpo umano. Manuele Gragnolati studia precisamente le varie dottrine sulla formazione dell'anima umana che contribuirono alla formulazione dell'embriologia dantesca. Vedi *Experiencing the Afterlife. Soul and Body in Dante and Medieval Culture* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 67–77.

23. San Bernardo, *Sermo Diversis*, 50. Per un commento al *Sermo* 50 di San Bernardo vedi E. Gilson, *Mystical Theology*, 100.

24. Lode van Hecke, *Le désir dans l'expérience religieuse: l'homme réuni, relecture de Saint Bernard* (Paris: Les éditions du cerf, 2007), 76

25. Dante, come ogni cristiano, credeva nell'immortalità dell'anima umana. Immortalità che fu persa come esperienza diretta con il peccato originale, ma che tuttavia è stata di nuovo resa accessibile all'uomo grazie alla redenzione di Cristo (*Par.* 7.97–123). Bruno Nardi così commenta la condizione dell'uomo prima e dopo il peccato secondo Dante: "Per il Poeta, i primi parenti, poiché furono creati immediatamente da Dio, ebbero la pienezza dell'animale perfezione (*Pd* XIII 79 ss.), e furono quindi liberi ed immortali per natura, come naturalmente incorruttibili sono i cieli, le intelligenze separate e l'anima umana (*Pd* VII 64 e ss.). E simili ai primi parenti sarebbero stati i loro figlioli, perché la natura, quando non ne sia impedita, fa sì che il generato sia uguale al generante (*Pd* VIII 133–35; *Cv* IV x 8). Immortale, libero e perfetto per natura, Adamo avrebbe generato una prole naturalmente libera, perfetta e immortale. Nell'Eden l'uomo sarebbe stato immune da tutte quelle imperfezioni, sulle quali si fonda il concetto aristotelico della naturalità dello Stato. Ma per il peccato originale l'uomo cadde di sua nobiltà, perse la pienezza dell'umana perfezione e, con questa, la libertà e l'immortalità corporale, e fu soggetto 'a la virtute delle cose nove' (*Pd* VII 70), le quali influenzano direttamente l'animalità dell'uomo e, per essa, il suo spirito (*Pg* XVI 73 e ss.). La natura umana fu dunque ferita e corrotta intrinsecamente, e la condizione nella quale si trova l'uomo dopo il peccato, con tutte le sue imperfezioni, è per se stessa innaturale" (*Saggi di filosofia dantesca* [Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1967], 226–27). Nel settimo canto del *Paradiso*, Beatrice dice che l'uomo ha perso tre cose con il peccato: l'immortalità, la conformità, e la somiglianza con Dio (66–84): "Secondo il pensiero di Dante nella *Commedia*, la vecchiaia e la morte sono mali naturali soltanto in un senso molto relativo; essi sono, anzitutto, la conseguenza del peccato d'Adamo. Nell'intenzioni di Dio e per il fatto della sua creazione immediata, l'uomo era immortale; ché le cause seconde o agenti naturali non potevano,

senza permissione divina, corrompere la forma umana direttamente sigillata da Dio nella materia" (B. Nardi, *Dante e la cultura medievale* [Roma: Laterza, 1983], 137).

26. I due centri più fertili di traduzioni latine delle opere di Aristotele furono l'Italia meridionale e soprattutto Toledo. Le opere di Aristotele venivano tradotte in latino sia direttamente dal greco che nelle loro traduzioni e commenti arabi. Le traduzioni di Aristotele dall'arabo, rispetto a quelle direttamente dal greco, come sottolinea Charles Burnett, avevano il vantaggio di far parte di "a lively tradition of commentary and teaching up to the time of the translators themselves," tra cui Averroè ed Avicenna erano i commentatori più citati, come indica Charles Burnett, "Arabic Into Latin: the Reception of Arabic Philosophy into Western Europe," in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, ed. Peter Adamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 374. Quello che mi preme sottolineare in questa nota, nel variegato modo in cui le opere di Aristotele vennero accolte nell'Europa medievale, è puntualizzare un aspetto importante di molte delle traduzioni e commenti dello stagirita dall'arabo, come fa notare ancora Burnett: "the Arabic tradition supplied not the 'pure' Aristotle's works of the fourth century B.C.E., but rather . . . the late Neoplatonic curriculum, in which Aristotle's metaphysics was crowned with a rational theology issuing from the Platonic tradition" ("Arabic into Latin," 376). Sullo stesso argomento vedi anche Cristina D'Ancona, "Greek into Arabic: Neoplatonism in Translation," *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, 28–50; e Frederick Charles Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 2 (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1961), 207–11. Aristotele entrò quindi nell'Europa medievale sia attraverso l'interpretazione platonizzante di vari commentatori arabi, Avicenna per esempio, sia attraverso una più fedele aderenza alla filosofia del filosofo greco, come in Averroè. In termini generali, come scrive Copleston: "the system of Aristotle, of Avicenna, of Averroes, opened up a wide vista of the scope of the human reason and it was clear that the truth attained in them must have been independent of Christian revelation. . . . in this way the new translations helped to clarify in the minds of the medievals the relation between philosophy and theology" (*A History of Philosophy*, 208). Su questo importante aspetto della distinzione tra fede e filosofia, come uno dei contributi dell'influenza araba nel mondo medievale, vedi anche Nardi, *Dante e la Cultura*, 154–72.

27. Se come abbiamo ricordato la filosofia di Aristotele ed i commentatori e filosofi arabi contribuirono a chiarire la separazione tra filosofia e teologia, dall'altro essa provocò anche forti reazioni da parte della chiesa fino alla proibizione nel 1250 circa, dello studio e delle pubbliche letture delle opere dello Stagirita e dei suoi commentatori. Il veto riguardava anche, e soprattutto, gli studi aristotelici dell'università di Parigi—dell'averroismo in particolare impersonato da Sigieri di Bramante—allora il centro intellettuale più importante dell'Europa medievale. Le ragioni di reazioni così forti dipendevano in parte sia dall'attribuzione erronea di libri neoplatonici ad Aristotele, come per il *Liber de causis*, che appariva confermare le teorie neoplatoniche degli arabi attribuite come vere al filosofo greco (Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, 209), sia alla stessa forza e unità del sistema di conoscenza aristotelico, che sembrava poter esaurire e completare le possibilità umane nella forza della ragione.

28. Gli spiriti magni nel Limbo dantesco rappresentano questa perfetta conoscenza possibile all'uomo privato dell'esperienza stessa del cristianesimo. Ciò che relega i grandi uomini dell'antichità nel Limbo è la mancanza di quella che è l'essenza stessa della religione cristiana, vale a dire la speranza nella visione divina, come nelle parole di Virgilio: "non per altro rio, / semo perduti, e sol di tanto offesi / che senza speme vivemo in disio" (*Inf.* 3.40–42). I beni soprannaturali, ricordiamo, sono quelle verità di fede che il peccato ha tolto all'esperienza diretta dell'uomo, cioè l'immortalità, la conformità e la somiglianza a Dio, come Dante spiega nel settimo canto del *Paradiso* (66–93); vedi anche *Par.* 13.31–111.

29. L'uso del termine ragione, *ratio*, ai tempi di Dante è complesso quanto quello di anima. La ragione veniva a designare sia "il fondamento intellegibile, oggettivo delle cose, sia la facoltà umana capace di cogliere questo stesso fondamento intellegibile . . . per quanto riguarda, prima di tutto, il significato di ragione come fondamento intellegibile delle cose, è da ricordare che la tradizione patristica, fondamentalmente platonizzante, tende a identificare con le *rationes*, eternamente presenti nel Verbo divino, la verità ontologica, l'essenza stesse delle cose (di qui la dottrina agostiniana delle *rationes seminales*, la teoria delle *causae primordiales*, nell'opera dell'Eurigena)" (Marta Cristiani, "Ragione" *Enciclopedia dantesca* [Venezia: Istituto per la collaborazione culturale, 1958], vol. 4, 833). Dall'altro

lato la ragione come facoltà umana designata alla conoscenza, si presta a numerose interpretazioni. L'avvento delle traduzioni di Aristotele, soprattutto del *De anima*, contribuì a definire, ma anche a limitare, le possibilità conoscitive della ragione. Secondo l'insegnamento del *De anima* la ragione è l'ultima delle potenze dell'anima in ordine gerarchico che porta a perfezione e a compimento l'evoluzione umana, dopo il senso e l'immaginazione, ed è anche quella che distingue l'uomo dalle bestie e dalle piante, e lo rende superiore ad esse. La ragione, in questa struttura aristotelica, risulta dipendente dal senso, senza il quale non potrebbe nemmeno manifestarsi nell'uomo; ma nello stesso tempo, la ragione è capace di controllare il senso, attraverso la capacità di scelta, la morale e la politica. Proprio grazie a questa abilità superiore della ragione, l'uomo, secondo Dante, "partecipa de la divina natura a guisa di sempiterna intelligenza" (*Conv.* 3.2.14), e si avvicina alla natura angelica nella capacità di distaccarsi, per quanto è possibile, dalla materia attraverso l'astrazione e il ragionamento. Ma nello stesso tempo, l'uomo può relegarsi alla condizione animale quando oscura a tal punto la ragione da ridursi e piegarsi alla sola vita sensoriale. I dannati dell'*Inferno* sono proprio coloro che "la ragion sottomettono al talento" (*Inf.* 5.39). Accanto alla ragione così intesa grazie ad Aristotele esiste, nella gerarchia universale, la natura solo intellettuale degli angeli. Il termine intelletto viene così a designare la natura divina degli angeli e di Dio stesso, è la sua prima caratteristica è di essere immateriale ed immortale. Tuttavia l'intelletto non è solo riservato agli angeli, ma anche all'uomo. Dante nella descrizione dell'evoluzione embrionale umana sottolinea come Dio ponga se stesso nel "cerebro" (*Purg.* 25.69) dell'uomo in forma "di spirito novo, di virtù repleto" (72). Lo *spirito novo* è l'intelletto possibile, anch'esso di origine aristotelica e poi tomistica, attraverso il quale l'uomo diventa effettivamente tale, vale a dire distinto dal mondo animale, pur facendone parte, è contemporaneamente partecipa al divino stesso, fatto della stessa sostanza divina e capace quindi di conoscere Dio stesso nella sua essenza, capace, come dice il pellegrino della *Commedia* ai vertici dell'esperienza dello spirito, di "giung[ere] / l'aspetto mio col valore infinito" (*Par* 33.79–81). In tal modo si viene a delineare una distinzione tra intelletto e ragione basata sulle loro rispettive forme di conoscenze. Alla ragione è assegnata la capacità di conoscere il mondo fenomenico, e Dio stesso, attraverso ragionamenti e strutture logiche, mentre l'intelletto conosce attraverso intuizioni, in maniera "immediata, unificante, sottratta all'ordine spazio-temporale" (Cristiani, *Enciclopedia dantesca*, "Ragione," vol. 4, 837). San Tommaso descrive nel seguente modo la distinzione tra ragione e intelletto: "intellectus and ratio differunt quantum ad modum cognoscendi, quia scilicet intellectus ognoscit simplici intuitu, ratio vero discurrendo de uno in aliud. Sed tamen ratio per discursum pervenit ad cognoscendum illud quod intellectus sine discursu cognoscit, scilicet universale. Idem est ergo objectum quod appetitui proponitur et ex parte rationis, et ex parte intellectus" (*ST I*, q. 59, a. 1).

30. B. Nardi riassume nel seguente modo la divisione tra filosofia e teologia nel Medioevo: "Si chiamò *theologia* l'intuizione cristiana della vita e del mondo, basata sulla predicazione evangelica e dai Padri elaborata in sistema dommatico. All'opposto, alle dottrine derivate da Aristotele, il philosophus per antonomasia, e dai suoi continuatori ed esegeti, si riservò il nome di *philosophia*. Ma la filosofia veniva, così, intesa in un senso restrittivo; essa non abbracciava tutto quanto il pensiero della nuova civiltà medievale, ma solo una parte di esso; quella parte rappresentata appunto dalla scienza greco-araba, quella scienza che aveva esplorato tanto domini rimasti sconosciuti fino allora ai popoli dell'occidente latino. Fuori dalla filosofia così restrittivamente intesa, rimanevano i domini e le credenze cristiane, tutta insomma l'esperienza religiosa di dodici secoli. È anche questa era filosofia, sebbene non le si desse questo nome; anzi la vera filosofia, cioè il pensiero creatore di quella civiltà che si era sviluppata dal Cristianesimo" (*Dante e la cultura*, 167).

31. Nel ventinovesimo canto del *Paradiso* Beatrice ripeterà sdegnosamente le false pretese e la vanità della filosofia in materia divina, che fanno vivere l'uomo in un inganno costante, in un sonno ad occhi aperti (82): "Voi non andate giù per un sentiero / filosofando: tanto vi trasporta / l'amor de l'apparenza e 'l suo pensiero!" (85–87). I rapporti tra ragione e fede dominano tutta l'opera di Dante, in un colloquio costante di armonia più che di opposizione. Nel *Convivio*, parlando dell'immortalità dell'anima, Dante descrive la ragione umana come un composto di mortale e di immortale (2.15), che ha quindi la capacità di indirizzare l'anima verso l'esperienza del mortale e dell'immortale nell'uomo. La ragione può condurre l'uomo alla perfetta conoscenza della natura, di portarlo alla conoscenza dell'ordine sociale, universale e stellare, attraverso la filosofia morale, la scienza e la teologia, e



proprio quest'ultima contempla lo sforzo costante di spiegare razionalmente la propria fede; ed infine può condurre fino al suo stesso superamento nel supremo contatto divino, con San Bernardo, "colui che 'n questo mondo, / contemplando, gustò di questa pace" (*Par.* 31.110–11). In questa distinzione, ma coerenza di composizione e sviluppo basato sulla ragione, si fonda la teoria dantesca delle due felicità, quella terrena e quella divina, e quindi dei due modi di fare esperienza, l'uno basato sulla filosofia e l'altro sulla religione, e dei due modi di guidare l'uomo alla realizzazione della sua felicità, attraverso l'impero e la chiesa (*Conv.* 1.10; *Mon.* 4.15.10; *Purg.* 16.106–8). Ancora nel *Convivio* Dante esalta la ragione a tal punto da considerare come morto, colui che non ragiona (4.12).

32. Étienne Gilson descrive il periodo della composizione del *Convivio* come un momento di "philosophic ecstasy . . . Dante glorifies philosophy as a source of bliss because he has just discovered the joy of understanding rational truth and the happiness of having it as his command" (*Dante the Philosopher*, tr. David Moore [London: Sheed & Ward, 1948], 97).

33. Gli 'oggetti' che studia la filosofia secondo Dante sono la scienza naturale, la morale e la metafisica, "la quale [metafisica], perché più necessariamente in quella [la filosofia] termina lo suo viso e con più fervore, [prima] filosofia è chiamata" (*Conv.* 3.16).

34. Gilson considera nel seguente modo la distinzione e armonia tra gli strumenti conoscitivi umani e le forme più giuste di governo temporale e secolare secondo Dante: "Nothing could be clearer than the distinction between these three authorities: philosophy teaches us the *whole* truth about the natural goal of man; theology, which alone leads us to our supernatural goal; finally, political power, which holding human greed in check, constrains men, by the force of the law, to respect the natural truth of the philosopher and the supernatural truth of the theologians" (*The Philosopher*, 196).

35. Nardi, nel suo *Dante e la cultura medievale*, descrive la donna gentile del *Convivio* come colei che: "mentre da un lato ci dimostra e lascia vedere una sua faccia, ce ne nasconde un'altra, che sono le cose celate alla mente umana, oggetto di fede e non di ragione (*Cv* III xiv 13–14); e verso la fine del trattato torna a ripeterci che essa era nel divino pensiero quando lo mondo fece; onde seguita che ella lo facesse: sì che egli può applicare alla donna gentile quello che nel libro de' *Proverbi* impersona della Sapienza: Quando Iddio apparecchiava i cieli, io era presente ecc. Anzi torna a identificarla con il logo giovanneo, affermando che, poi che fatti fummo, per noi dirizzare, in nostra similitudine venne a noi, cioè si fece carne nella persona di Cristo (*III* xv 16–17)" (58–59; vedi, per analoghe riflessioni, anche pag. 162–66 e Nardi, *Saggi*, 302–10).

36. San Bonaventura, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, IV 4, 5 e San Tommaso, *ST I* q. 3, a. 1.

37. Giuseppe Ungaretti, "Il Canto I dell'Inferno," *Lecture dantesche*, ed. Giovanni Getto (Firenze: Sansoni, 1964), 11.

38. "Natura certo, quando lasciò l'arte / di sì fatti animali, assai fé bene" (*Inf.* 31.49–50); Dante in questi versi si riferisce proprio ad un passato primordiale pieno di terrore per l'uomo, in cui la terra era popolata da *animali*, sono "li orribili giganti" (44), ora incatenati nel basso *Inferno*. Nella *Genesi* 6:4 si parla dell'esistenza dei giganti al tempo dei primi uomini.

39. "Itaque valde cavenda haec ignorantia, qua de nobis minus nobis forte sentimus" (San Bernardo, *De diligendo Deo* 2.4). Dante nel *Convivio* così descrive la differenza tra una persona magnanima ed una pusillanime: "sempre lo magnanimo si magnifica in suo cuore, e così lo pusillanimo, per contrario, sempre si tiene meno che non è" (1.18).

40. Il cuore è anche il luogo dove risiede la "viltà" (*Inf.* 2.122) o l'"ardire" (123), che sono i sentimenti che spingono e impediscono il pellegrino ad agire in questi inizi del poema. Il termine 'ardore' è usato da Dante per riferirsi alla natura del desiderio, ma anche della carità e dell'affetto. L'ardore indica una particolare tensione ed energia che implica la partecipazione di tutto l'individuo nel suo tendere alla cosa amata. Gilson sottolinea come il termine ardore è usato spesso da San Bernardo, e, commentandone l'uso nel *Sermo* LXXXIII, offre la seguente spiegazione: "Ardent love (amor ardens, amare ardentem) is love at that degree of intensity which brings forgetfulness of the infinity Majesty of God, and a bold desire to enter into union. Bernard frequently compares this ardent love to an inebriation. It is characteristic of the state of the Bride, as contrasted with that of the disciple (obedience) or of the son (honour)" (*Mystical Theology*, 139). Come abbiamo già sottolineato (vedi p. 2), il cuore è presente anche nell'ultimo canto del *Paradiso*, come del luogo nel quale

rimane impressa l'esperienza divina. Webb riassume nel seguente modo lo status del cuore del pellegrino pieno della presenza divina: "Even in this most mystical moment of *Paradise*, the heart still works as the medical treatises describe. It is the container of blood and of life forces. In *Paradise*, this normal, organic function has been enhanced to the point where the heart can actually contain divine inspiration. More important, it can pour forth that inspiration in a poem 'in which both heaven and heart have had a hand.' Thus the divine, by means of a human heart, circulates back into the world" (*The Medieval Heart*, 72).

41. Nella *Retorica* Aristotele ripete un concetto simile: "we fear those things whence evil comes to us" (1382b 32).

42. Vedi Aristotele sempre nell'*Etica* 10.4.

43. Già il commento di Giovanni Boccaccio a questi versi di Dante faceva riferimento all'*Etica* di Aristotele, *Dartmouth Dante Project*, *List of Commentaries*: <http://dante.dartmouth.edu/>. Dante ripete un concetto simile nel *Paradiso* 1.31.

44. Così riassume Dante la venuta dal male ed essere agiti da esso: "Giunse quel mal voler che pur mal chiede / con lo 'ntelletto, e mosse il fumo e 'l vento / per la virtù che sua natura diede" (*Purg.* 5.111-14).

45. Nella *Bibbia* l'azione maligna e malvagia è descritta in termini di piacere, esattamente del provare piacere commettendo ingiustizie: "l'appetito dei perfidi si soddisfa con i sopprusi" (Proverbi 13:2).

46. Giovanni Farris, *Significati spirituali nei "Sermones" di Jacopo da Varazze e nella Divina Commedia* (Savona: M. Sabatelli, 1998), 31.

47. Nel primo canto del *Purgatorio* ritorna la memoria di questa condizione iniziale, dove la paura della morte era vicina come non mai: "Questi non vide mai l'ultima sera; ma per sua follia le fu sì presso / che molto poco tempo a volger era" (*Purg.* 1.58-60).

48. Anche la terra emersa, nella spiegazione di Virgilio sulla geografia terrestre, per timore di Lucifero che cadde dall'Empireo dalla parte dell'emisfero australe dopo il suo tradimento, si ritrasse sotto la superficie marina per paura di lui e riemerse nell'emisfero boreale; così anche la montagna del *Purgatorio* si innalza nella parte più distante dal primo dei diavoli (*Inf.* 34.121-26).

49. "Timor Dei comparatur ad totam vitam humanam per sapientiam Dei regulatam sicut radix ad arborem; unde dicitur Eccli. I, Radix sapientiae est timere Dominum; rami enim illius longaevi. Et ideo sicut radix virtute dicitur esse tota arbor, ita timor Dei dicitur esse sapientiae" (San Tommaso, *ST* II-II, q. 19, a. 7). San Bernardo così descrive il ruolo del timore di Dio nel cammino spirituale: "Aliud est multas divitias scire, aliud et possidere: nec notitia divitem facit, sed possessio. Sic prorsus, sic aliud est nosse Deum, et aliud timere; nec cognitio sapientem, sed timor facit, qui afficit" (*Sermones* 23.14).

50. Scrive Marie-Michel Philipon: "Les dons du Saint-Esprit constituent une hiérarchie de principes d'action nettement différenciés. A la base le don de crainte, au sommet le don de sagesse, chacun des dons possédant un champ d'action spécifiquement distinct: le don d'intelligence pour la pénétration de tous les mystères, le don de science et de sagesse pour juger de tout par les causes seconds ou par les causes divines, le don de conseil pour diriger l'action concrète, contingente. Ces quatre dons intellectuels se hiérarchisent eux-mêmes dans l'ordre suivant: sagesse, intelligence, science et conseil. Les trois autres dons ont pour sujet la volonté selon trois fonctions distinctes: le don de piété venant animer toutes les relations de l'homme avec les autres êtres de l'univers et avec le Trois Personnes divines, le don de force afin d'assumer en toute circonstance et malgré toutes les difficultés notre vocation de fils de Dieu, à l'image du Christ, enfin le don de crainte pour éviter le mal et nous permettre de ne jamais contrister l'Esprit-Saint" (*Les dons du Saint-Esprit* [Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1964], 144).

51. "Ad primum ergo dicendum quod timor maxime requiritur quasi primordium quoddam perfectionis donorum" (San Tommaso, *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 7).

52. Il fondamento della dottrina dei doni è in Isaia 11:2, dove il profeta descrive l'azione dello spirito santo: "un germoglio spunterà dal tronco di Iesse, / un virgulto germoglierà dalle sue radici. / Su di lui si poserà lo spirito del Signore, / spirito di sapienza e di intelligenza, / spirito di consiglio e

di forza, / spirito di conoscenza e di timore del signore” (è da notare che non si parla di doni nelle *Sacre Scritture*, ma di spirito).

53. “Quatuor pertinent ad rationem, scilicet sapientia, scientia, intellectus et consilium; et tria ad vim appetitivam, scilicet fortitudo, pietas et timor” (San Tommaso, *ST I-II*, q. 68, a. 1). I doni dello Spirito Santo si oppongono a specifici impedimenti del cammino spirituale, come spiega San Tommaso, citando San Gregorio: “Gregorius dicit quod *Spiritus Sanctus dat sapientiam contra stultitiam, intellectum contra hebetudinem, consilium contra praecipitationem, fortitudinem contra timorem, scientia contra ignorantiam, pietatem contra duritiam, timorem contra superbiam*” (I-II, Q. 68, art. 2).

54. Marie-Michel Labourdette and André Rayez. “Dons du Saint-Esprit.” *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, vol 5, 1594.

55. San Tommaso si riferisce all'azione dei doni come: “ultra modum humanum” (*Scriptum super Sententiis*, 1594).

56. Philippon, *Les Dons*, 220.

57. Philippon segue descrivendo la condizione dell'anima resa deiforme: “[l'anima] transformée en Lui par sa filiation de gloire, elle est introduite en pleine vision divine pour y participer à la même vie de lumière dans le Verbe et d'amour dans l'Esprit-Saint. L'essence divine devient l'objet immédiat et éblouissant de sa contemplation d'amour. Alors la Trinité se trouve présente, à un nouveau titre, d'une présence, non plus seulement créatrice et divinatrice, ontologique, mais objective, à la manière de Personnes familières avec qui l'on vit dans le «face à face», à visage découvert” (*Les Dons*, 235).

58. La teologia dei doni si inserisce all'interno “delle ramificazioni della grazia, [grazia che] rappresenta l'*habitus* deiforme che conforma l'anima alla Trinità. Le sette virtù (le tre teologiche e le quattro cardinali), i sette doni dello Spirito Santo e le sette beatitudini ‘riformano’ in crescendo l'anima, attraverso la triplice operazione della *rectificatio* (*'habitus virtutum sunt ad agendum recte'*), della *expeditio* (*'habitus donorum ad agendum expedite'*) ed infine della *perfectio* (*'habitus beatitudinum ad agendum sive patendum perfecte'*)” (Tedoldi, *La dottrina*, 144). Solo a questo punto l'anima gode della presenza divina attraverso i sensi spirituali, come conseguenza ed effetto diretto della nuova condizione nella vita dello spirito. In questa nota non si può che accennare alla tradizione dei sensi spirituali in Dante, tradizione importante per cercare di capire le esperienze divine che Dante descrive nella terza cantica, al fine di non confonderle con una sensorialità carnale, ed alla stregua delle esperienze delle prime due cantiche, ma come ciò che effettivamente sono, vale a dire esperienze spirituali attraverso una riformazione dei sensi stessi che si scoprono abili alla percezione divina. La dottrina dei sensi spirituali ha una lunga tradizione e attraversa tutto il misticismo cristiano, dai Padri della Chiesa, a Sant'Agostino fino al Medioevo. Proprio nel Medioevo la Dottrina ha trovato il suo più geniale pensatore in San Bonaventura. Comunque le guide spirituali che Dante cita nella *Commedia* sono considerate i maestri della dottrina dei sensi spirituali: Ugo di San Vittore (*De archa Noe morali* 15), Riccardo di San Vittore (*Benjamin Major* 17), San Tommaso (*ST I-II*, q. 58, a. 2), San Bernardo (*De diligendo Deo* 10.28), e San Bonaventura (*Breviloquium* 5.6). Dante tenne ben presente tale tradizione, non solo nel momento in cui deve descrivere le esperienze di *Paradiso*, ma anche nella struttura teologica e mistica della *Commedia*, inserendo le descrizioni dell'esperienza diretta dei piaceri divini in precisi momenti del poema in cui sono presentate proprio le *ramificazioni* della grazia. Nel paradiso terrestre per esempio, in cui vengono introdotti i doni dello spirito santo, come abbiamo già sottolineato, oppure all'inizio del canto ventisettesimo del *Paradiso*, esattamente dopo i tre canti dedicati alle virtù teologiche, virtù che rappresentano un altro aspetto della presenza della grazia, assistiamo alla meraviglia di una sensorialità spirituale infusa e rivelata direttamente alla percezione: “Ciò ch'io vedeva mi sembrava un riso / de l'universo; per che mia ebbrezza / intrava per l'udire e per lo viso. / Oh gioia! Oh ineffabile allegrezza! / oh vita intègra d'amore e di pace / oh senza brama sicura ricchezza!” (4–9). Un aspetto importante da tener presente nel parlare della tradizione dei sensi spirituali ai tempi di Dante, ed in Dante in particolare, è l'utilizzo della filosofia aristotelica, soprattutto del *De anima*, per descrivere l'azione stessa della grazia all'interno della struttura dell'anima (vedi nota n. 3). Vorrei sottolineare in questa sede quello che è forse l'apporto più importante del *De Anima* alla dottrina, vale a dire il fondamentale valore della sensorialità nel determinare la conoscenza umana, con il suo agire direttamente e nel presente, suggerendo la possibilità di inserire la stessa esperienza spirituale, l'incarnazione, nella dimensione limitante, finita e sempre mutevole dell'interrelazione del

senso con il mondo esterno. La dottrina nasce infatti, dal desiderio dell'uomo di unirsi a Dio, ed è proprio la categoria dell'esperienza, con il suo primario e fondante modo di conoscere per contatto diretto, che diventa il modo principale di relazionarsi al divino: "La dottrina include, ancora, un anelito: il sogno di colmare il vallo che separa la conoscenza dall'amore. Svelando, infatti, come l'atto percettivo sia anche, e nello stesso tempo, un'esperienza di unione tra *cognoscens* ed il *cognitum*, giunge ad identificare *cognitio* e *fruitio*, inglobandole nel termine *experientia* nel quale entrambe si riconoscono. Tale congiunzione rimanda, poi, ad una successiva, quella tra *teoria* e *pratica*. Solo una conoscenza che diventa amore, rende pratica vissuta quella teoria nella quale si era creduto. Dinamismo, questo, che chiama in causa la santità, solo nella quale c'è la concreta verifica di un sapere che si è tradotto in opere, mutandosi in *sapientia*" (Tedoldi, *La Dottrina*, 17-18).

59. Anche nel *Convivio* Dante parla dei sette doni dello spirito santo: "la somma deitade, cioè Dio, vede apparecchiata la sua creatura a ricevere del suo beneficio, tanto largamente in quella ne mette quanto apparecchiata è a riceverne. E però che da ineffabile caritate vengono questi doni, e la divina caritate sia appropriata al lo Spirito Santo, quindi è che chiamati sono doni di Spirito Santo. Li quali, secondo che li distingue Isaia profeta, sono sette, cioè Sapienza, Intelletto, Consiglio, Fortezza, Scienza e Timore di Dio. Oh buone biade, e buona e ammirabile sementa! Oh ammirabile e benigno seminatore, che non attende se non che la natura umana li apparecchi la terra a seminare" (4.21).

60. "Sed quantum ad effectum, initium sapientiae est unde sapientia incipit operari; et hoc modo timor est initium sapientiae; aliter tamen timor servilis, et aliter timor filialis" (San Tommaso (ST II-II, q. 19, a. 7). La fede, invece, è l'origine della sapienza secondo la sua essenza: "Dicendum quod initium sapientiae potest aliquid dici dupliciter. Uno modo quia est initium ipsius sapientiae quantum ad ejus essentiam; alio modo quantum ad ejus effectum. Sicut initium artis secundum ejus essentiam sunt principia ex quibus procedit ars; initium autem artis secundum ejus effectum est unde incipit ars operari . . . sic ergo initium sapientiae secundum ejus essentiam sunt prima principia sapientiae, quae sunt articuli fidei; et secundum hoc fides dicitur sapientiae initium" (ibid.).

61. Éphrem Boularand, "Crainte," *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, vol. I, part II, 2485. San Tommaso nella *Summa* insiste sulla realzione tra timore filiale e carità, e come il timore servile decresce fino a scomparire in relazione alla predominanza della carità: "Dicendum quod duplex est timor Dei, sicut dictum est. Unus quidem filialis, quo quis timet offensam patris vel separationem ab ipso; alius autem servilis, quo quis timet poenam. Timor autem filialis necesse est quod crescat crescente charitate, sicut effectus crescit crescente causa. Quanto enim aliquis magis diligit aliquem, tanto magis timet eum offendere et ab eo separari. Sed timor servilis quantum ad servilitatem totaliter tollitur charitate adveniente; remanet tamen secundum substantiam timor poenae, ut dictum est. Et iste timor diminuitur charitate crescente, maxime, maxime quantum ad actum, quia quanto aliquis magis diligit Deum, tanto minus timet poenam, primo quidem quia minus attendit ad proprium bonum, cui contrariatur poena; secundo quia firmius inhaerens magis confidit de praemio, et per consequens minus timet de poena" (II-II, q. 19, a. 10).

62. Rom. 8:15.

63. Éphrem Boularand, "Crainte," *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, vol. I, part II, 2511.

64. Riccardo di San Vittore, *Les douze patriarches, ou Benjamin major*, texte critique et traduction par Jean Châtillon et Monique Duchet-Suchaux (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1997), LXIV:21).

65. San Bernardo così si esprime descrivendo la condizione dell'uomo che ha perso il timore di Dio: "Et postquam terribili Dei iudicio prima flagitia impunitas sequitur, experta voluptas libenter repetitur, repetitia blanditur. Concupiscentia reviviscente, sopitur ratio, ligat consuetudo. Trahitur miser in profundum malorum, traditur captivus tyrannidi vitiorum, ita ut carnalium voragine desideriorum absorptus, suae rationis divinitus timoris oblitus, dicat INSIPIENS IN CORDE SUO: NON EST DEUS" (*Tractatus de gradibus humilitatis et superbiae* 21.51).

66. Nel canto ventottesimo dell'*Inferno* Virgilio usa parole simili a quelle che dirà a Catone nel primo canto del *Purgatorio* per spiegare il viaggio del pellegrino, come di un cammino che dovrà salvarlo dal peccato: "Né morte 'l giunse ancor, né colpa 'l mena / . . . a tormentarlo; / ma per dar lui esperienza piena, / a me, che morto son, convien menarlo / per lo 'nferno qua giù di giro in giro" (46-50). Così nel canto ventinovesimo: "I' [è Virgilio che parla] son un che discendo / con questo vivo giù di balzo in balzo, / e di mostrar lo 'nferno a lui intendo" (94-96). Mentre nel canto

ventottesimo del *Purgatorio* è questa volta Guido Guinezzelli che si rivolge al pellegrino leggendo perfettamente i motivi del suo viaggio: “Beato te, che de le nostre marche / . . . / per morir meglio, esperienza imbarche” (73–75).

67. Beatrice è naturalmente figura di Cristo, ed attraverso di lei si sperimenta il divino. Il dono del timore di Dio infatti rende simile al figlio di Dio: “Le don de crainte filiale nous assimile, de l'intérieur, au Christ, Fils de Dieu: en nous disposant, comme a lui, à révéler notre Père, et à nous conformer à sa volonté, au moindre souffle de l'Esprit d'amour” (É. Boularand, “Crainte,” *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, vol. I, part II, 2509).

68. San Tommaso, *ST II-II*, q. 19, a.1.

69. Le parole di ringraziamento di Dante verso Beatrice hanno una articolazione più completa: “O donna in cui la mia speranza vige, / e che soffristi per la mia salute / in inferno lasciar le tue vestige, / di tante cose quant'io ho vedute, / dal tuo podere e da la tua bontade / riconosco la grazia e la virtute. / Tu m'hai di servo tratto a libertade / per tutte quelle vie, per tutt'i modi / che di ciò fare avrei la potestate. / La tua magnificenza in me custodi, / sì che l'anima mia, che fatt'hai sana, / piacente a te dal corpo si disnodi.’ / Così orai; e quella, sì lontana / come pareva, sorrise e riguardommi; / poi si tonrò a l'eterna fontana” (79–93).

# American Dante Bibliography for 2010

RICHARD LANSING

**T**his bibliography is intended to include all publications on Dante (books, articles, translations, reviews) written by North American writers or published in North America in 2010 as well as reviews from foreign sources of books published in the United States and Canada.

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Juan J. Colina de Vivero\*, Philadelphia, PA  
James J. Collins, Philadelphia, PA  
Vittoria Colonnese-Benni, Ottawa, ON, Canada  
Neil E.G. Coltart\*\*, Glasgow, Scotland  
Stephen M. Conger, Chevy Chase, MD  
Christopher L. Conostas, Chestnut Hill, MA  
Melissa Conway, Moreno Valley, CA  
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Jerome Mazzaro<sup>\*</sup>, New York, NY  
Angelo Mazzocco, South Hadley, MA  
Giuseppe Mazzotta, New Haven, CT  
Sean McAvoy, New Haven, CT  
Bowen H. McCoy, Los Angeles, CA  
Michael P. McDonald<sup>\*</sup>, Washington, DC  
Stephen McFarland, Brooklyn, NY  
Carin McLain, New York, NY  
William John Meegan<sup>\*</sup>, Syracuse, NY  
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Bodo Reichenbach, Arlington, MA  
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## The Dante Prize and the Charles Hall Grandgent Award

Since 1887 the Dante Society of America has offered an annual prize for the best student essay on a subject related to the life or works of Dante. The Dante Prize of five hundred dollars is offered for the best essay submitted by an undergraduate in any American or Canadian college or university, or by anyone not enrolled as a graduate student who has received the degree of A.B. or its equivalent within the past year. In addition, a prize of seven hundred and fifty dollars, the Charles Hall Grandgent Award, is offered for the best essay submitted by an American or Canadian student enrolled in any graduate program.

All submissions must be sent as e-mail attachments to the Dante Society at [dsa@dantesociety.org](mailto:dsa@dantesociety.org). Undergraduate essays should be no longer than 5,000 words and graduate essays no longer than 7,000 words. The deadline for submission is June 30.

Each writer should provide a cover page (as the first page of the file) giving the writer's name, local, permanent and e-mail addresses, the title of the essay, the essay category, and the writer's institutional affiliation. The writer's name should not appear on the essay title page (to follow the cover page) or on any other page of the essay since the essays are submitted anonymously to the readers. Quotations from Dante's works should be cited in the original language, and the format of an essay should conform to either the Chicago or MLA Style Sheet guidelines.

Submissions will be judged by a special Committee of the Society. If it should be decided that none of the essays submitted deserves a full prize, the Society may award one prize to two contestants, each to receive one half of the prize, or it may make no award. The results will be announced in early autumn and published in the fall issue of the Society's *Newsletter* and in *Dante Studies*. While the essays remain the intellectual property of the writers, the submitted text will not be returned to authors.

## Report of the Secretary

The 129th Annual Meeting of the Dante Society (and the 56th of the incorporated Dante Society of America) was held at the Carriage House of the Longfellow National Historic Site in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on Saturday, May 21, 2011. **President Vickers** called the meeting to order at 11:00 a.m.

President Vickers introduced Mr. **Jim Shea**, Manager of the Longfellow National Historic Site, who, after welcoming those present, briefly described the holdings and activities of the Site, noting in particular the services available to members of the scholarly community.

The minutes of the 128th Annual Meeting were read and approved.

After the business meeting, President Vickers introduced Professor **William P. Caferro** (Vanderbilt University), who spoke to the members on the subject of “Contextualizing Dante’s Reading of Byzantium and Empire.”

The balloting in the Spring of 2011 resulted in the election to the Council of **Joseph Luzzi** and **Vittorio Montemaggi** for a term of three years. **Vincent Pollina**, having respectfully declined the nomination to stand for a fourth term as Secretary-Treasurer, nonetheless agreed to continue in office until a successor was named. In the summer, **Albert Ascoli** was elected Vice-President for the year 2011–2012.

In the prize competition for 2010, the Dante Prize for the best undergraduate essay was awarded to **William Porter** of SUNY-Geneseo for “‘L’Arco de lo essilio’: The Nexus of History, Pilgrimage, and Prophecy in the Heaven of Mars.” The Charles Hall Grandgent Award for the best essay by a graduate student went to Christiana Purdy Moudarres (Yale University) for “Devouring Selves in the Circle of Gluttony: A Gloss on the *Contrapasso* of *Inferno* 6.” **Victoria Kirkham** (Chair) and **Albert Ascoli** served as judges.

The Dante Society met in conjunction with the 2011 MLA Annual Convention in Los Angeles on Saturday, January 8, 2011. **Nancy Vickers** introduced a panel consisting of Peter Hawkins (Yale University),

Guy Raffa (University of Texas-Austin), and Arielle Saiber (Bowdoin College), who discussed “Dante and the Popular Imagination.”

The Society sponsored six sessions at the Forty-Sixth International Congress on Medieval Studies, held at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan, May 12–15, 2011:

Dante I: *Dante’s Poetry: Language, Silence, Images*, **Christopher Kleinhenz** (University of Wisconsin-Madison), Chair. **Maria Luisa Ardizzone** (New York University): “The Plural Word: A Fragment of Dante’s Poetics.” **Santa Casciani** (John Carroll University): “Darkness of Silence: Bonaventure and Dante.” **Alexa Sand** (Utah State University): “Strangely Dark, Painfully Bright: The Unbearable Lightness of Seeing in *Inferno* 21 and *Paradiso* 33.” **Laurence Hooper** (University of Chicago): “Exile and the *Canzone* in Dante’s Eden.”

Dante II: *Dante and Politics—Then and Now*, **Melissa Conway** (University of California-Riverside), Chair. **Thomas Renna** (Saginaw Valley State University): “Empire and Augustinian Papalists.” **Jason Aleksander** (Saint Xavier University): “Political Authority and the Illustrious Vernacular in Dante’s Political Philosophy.” **Luigi G. Ferri** (John Carroll University): “‘Lunga promessa con l’attender corto’: Dante in Today’s Italian Politics.”

Dante III: *Law and Legal Considerations in Dante*, **Jason Aleksander** (Saint Xavier University), Chair. **Francesco Aimerito** (Università del Piemonte Orientale Amedeo Avogadro): “Medieval Law in Dante’s *Purgatorio*.” **Gabriella I. Baika** (Florida Institute of Technology): “Pride, Wrath, and Inverted Grammar in *Inferno* 14–16.” **Akash Kumar** (Columbia University): “Power to Choose: Dante’s Piccarda as a Repudiation of Gratian’s *Decretum*.”

Dante IV: *Dante and Virgil: Questions of Influence*, **Vincent Pollina** (Tufts University), Chair.

**Umberto Taccheri** (St. Mary’s College): “Textual Precedents in *Inferno* 2:10–48.” **Paul V. Rockwell** (Amherst College): “The Polydorus Allusion and the Question of Referentiality.” **Susan Gorman** (Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences): “Justinian as Anchises: Allusions to the Virgilian Underworld in *Paradiso* 6.”

Dante V: *Hagiographical and Sacramental Approaches to Dante’s Commedia*, **Jelena Todorovic** (University of Wisconsin-Madison), Chair. **Anne Schuchman** (College of Staten Island, CUNY): “Dante and the Narrative of Medieval Hagiography.” **Elizabeth Dolly Weber** (University of Illinois-Chicago): “Connoisseurs of Sin: Virgil, Dante, and Confession in the *Commedia*.” **Anne Sullivan** (Independent Scholar): “The Thrill and Tenderness of Christian Rapture: Facing the Riddle of the Scorpion in Dante’s *Purgatorio* 9.”

Dante VI: *Gender and Biology in Dante*, **Karina F. Attar** (Queens College, CUNY), Chair. **Seamus O’Neill** (Memorial University of Newfoundland):

“‘How Does the Body Depart?’: A Plotinian/Porphyrrian Reading of Dante’s Suicides.” **Christiana Purdy Moudarres** (Yale University): “The Flesh and Bone of a Montefeltro: *Inferno* 27.” **Sara E. Diaz** (New York University): “Bicci’s *Malfatata* and Forese’s *Vedovella*: Sexual Honor and Masculinity in and beyond the *Commedia*.”

# *Dante Studies* Style Sheet

## Guidelines for Authors

[2.14.12]

*Dante Studies* is the official annual of the Dante Society of America, which was founded in 1881 by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, James Russell Lowell, and Charles Eliot Norton (the Society's first three presidents) and others. Like the Dante Society as a whole, *Dante Studies* is dedicated to the furtherance of the study of the works of Dante Alighieri. Its editorial board welcomes submissions, in English or Italian, on all subjects connected with Dante's life, works, influence, and critical reception.

### General Remarks

For distinctive treatment of words and phrases, grammar, punctuation, style, and matters of bibliographic citation, consult the *Chicago Manual of Style* (parenthetical numbers below refer to the 15th edition). The following notes highlight major style issues and clarify *DS* preferences where *CMS* offers choices or where *DS* practice deviates from *CMS*. Authors are strongly encouraged to use inclusive language when possible.

### Abbreviations

Do not use abbreviations (except parenthetically) in run of text.

In notes, avoid *loc. cit.* and *op. cit.* Use *ibid.* only to refer the reader to a single bibliographic item cited in the immediately preceding note. If more than one work is cited in the previous note, an abbreviated (author-short title) citation should be used.

### Capitalization

Certain terms designating historical, political, or cultural movements or periods are traditionally capitalized (e.g., High Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Risorgimento); many such descriptive terms, however, need not be capitalized (e.g., antiquity, the quattrocento) (*CMS* 8.77–8.80). Capitalize adjectives derived from proper nouns that designate cultural movements and styles (e.g., Romanesque) (*CMS* 8.85); otherwise, such terms may be set lowercase.

Capitalize specific Dantean concepts (e.g., Purgatory), but do not capitalize units of topographical structure (e.g., ninth bolgia of the eighth circle).

Capitalize religious and theological concepts (e.g., the Annunciation).

Generic terms designating sections of poems, plays, and the like should be capitalized only when used with figures to cite particular sections (e.g., Canto 23, Book 4 of the *Aeneid*, the eleventh canto). Note that this opposes the recommendation of CMS 8.194, which specifies that such terms be universally lowercase.

Capitalize permanent epithets and personal titles that function as part of the name or can be used in direct address. Titles occurring in apposition that function descriptively (and would not occur in direct address) should not be capitalized. Titles used alone or following a name should be lowercased in run of text (but capitalized in acknowledgments and the like). (CMS 8.21–38)

the bishop of Paris, William of Auvergne

Doctor Angelicus

Fra Remigio de' Girolami, lector of theology at Santa Maria Novella

King George III, *but* the king of England

the Master

Pope Innocent III, the pope

The prefect Acerbo Falseroni of Florence

secretary-treasurer Vincent Pollina (*but* Address correspondence to  
Vincent Pollina, Secretary-Treasurer, The Dante Society of  
America)

Capitalize all principal words in French names of buildings (e.g., Opéra-Comique). In the names of associations, institutions, exhibitions, organizations, and the like, capitalize the first substantive only (e.g., la Légion d'honneur). Note that translated names follow English conventions for capitalization; for example, Exposition universelle internationale is rendered as Universal Exposition.

## Citations

### *Archives and Libraries*

Use full names for first instance of a given institution, though sigla may be abbreviated:

Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale (= Bibl. Naz.) (e.g., Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS Magl. [Magliabechiana] 165, fol. 1r)

London, British Library (e.g., London, British Library, MS Add. 19587)

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France (= Bib. nat.); Bib. nat. MS Lat. 6064; MS Arabe 384

Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. Lat. 4072

### *Edition-Independent Identifying Numbers*

Short citations to works by Dante are included parenthetically in running text (and may be used in notes as well): titles—spelled out in text (e.g., *Epistole* 13.10)—are abbreviated as below, with arabic identifying section numbers separated by periods.

*Conv.* 4.24

*Epist.* 13.10

*Inf.* 31.112–14

*Mon.* 3.4.12

*Par.* 33.131, 137

*Purg.* 5.114

*VN* 4.5

*DVE* 1.2.4

Works by other authors may be cited similarly after the complete title has been introduced. (For example, Vergil's *Aeneid*, referenced in the text, might be followed by a subsequent parenthetical *Aen.* 1.725). A single reference to a classical or medieval text, however, should not be abbreviated.

Note: Do not use a definite article with a cantica of the *Commedia* (e.g., “In *Inferno*, Dante).

### *Scripture*

Parenthetical references to scripture should use the “traditional” abbreviations (e.g., Gen. 1:14–19) (*CMS* 17.247, 15.51–15.53).



### *Secondary Literature*

There is no need to include a works list in addition to endnotes; however, authors must indicate facts of publication as completely as possible, including, for example, edition of works cited, series information, and so forth. For place of publication, use English-language equivalents for foreign city names (e.g., Florence, Rome, Vatican, *not* Firenze, Roma, Vaticano). If more than one place is given on the title page, use only the first. After an initial citation, abbreviate to author plus short title for subsequent mentions of the same work.

Use headline style capitalization for titles of English-language books and articles. Within titles, hyphenation of compounds should follow the “traditional” rules noted in *CMS* (8.170).

In general, citations of works in languages other than English may hew to *CMS*’s simple rule for sentence-style capitalization (10.3): “first word of title and subtitle and all proper nouns.” (This applies to titles of French periodicals as well as to titles of articles and books.) For German titles, see *CMS* 10.43. Note that Latin also capitalizes proper adjectives. Punctuation of foreign-language titles may be modified slightly to accord with American practice (e.g., change periods to colons before subtitles).

*Contra academicos*

*De civitate Dei*

*Storia della letteratura italiana*

Some journals follow their own convention:

*Studi Danteschi*

*Lettere Italiane*

*Quaderni d’Italianistica*

*Lettere Classensi*

Titles within titles. In article citations, titles may be italicized as usual (e.g., “*In Omnibus Viis Tuis*: Compline in the Valley of the Rulers”). Within italicized titles the embedded title may be enclosed in quotation marks. If embedded titles are clearly represented through capitalization, quotation marks are not necessary.

*La escatología musulmana en la Divina Comedia.*

John Kleiner, *Mismapping the Underworld: Daring and Error in Dante's "Comedy,"* *Figurae: Reading Medieval Culture* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994), 153 n. 33. [Note in this example that no comma comes between the page number and the note number (CMS 17.140).]

Do not italicize an initial "the" in the names of periodicals (the *New York Times*).

In indicating pages, *p.* or *pp.* is omitted unless necessary for clarity. Inclusive page ranges should be compressed according to the scheme summarized below (under "Numbers").

For Internet citations, do not enclose URLs in angle brackets.

In general, spell out series names in full; however, such well-known abbreviations as *PL* and *PMLA* need not be expanded.

Sample note forms:

EDITIONS

Dante Alighieri, *Commedia*, vol. 1 *Inferno*. Ed. Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi. (Milan: Mondadori, 1991).

Gregory, *Moralia in Job* 4.1 (*PL* 75.637–41).

ARTICLES

Charles T. Davis, "Dante's Vision of History," *Dante Studies* 118 (2000): 243–59.

Paul Renucci, "Dante et les mythes du Millenium," *Revue des études italiennes*, n.s., 11 (1965): 393–421. [French journal titles follow sentence-style capitalization]

BOOKS/ /MONOGRAPHS

Helga Scheible, *Die Gedichte in der "Consolatio Philosophiae" des Boethius*, *Bibliothek der klassischen Altertumswissenschaften*, n.F., 46 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1972).

Teodolinda Barolini, *Dante's Poets: Textuality and Truth in the Comedy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 212–15.

REFERENCE WORKS

*The Dante Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Forese."

## Italics

Foreign words and phrases not in general usage (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* may be considered a starting point in this regard) should be italicized (e.g., *canzoni*).

## Quotations

The *Commedia* is to be quoted according to a standard Italian critical edition of the text. Those of Giorgio Petrocchi (Milan: Mondadori, 1966–67; 2nd ed., 1994) or Federico Sanguineti (Florence: SISMEI, 2001) are currently recommended.

Use a word space on both sides of the solidus (e.g., “la quale è sì ‘invilita, / che ogn’ om par che mi dica: ‘Io t’abandonò,’”).

The journal does not include translations of Dante’s Italian texts unless there is a special *ad locum* reason. Extracts from Latin texts, however, should be translated in run of text, with the original text given in notes.

## Numbers

In run of text, spell out one through ninety-nine and large round numbers. In sentences including numbers both greater and less than ninety-nine, use figures. Do not use roman numerals in citations.

Dates should be expressed in the form *month day, year*. Decades should be written out in full in figures or as words (the 1330s, *or* the thirties, *but not* the ‘30s).

Spell out designations for centuries and unit modifiers composed thereof:

the fourteenth century; fourteenth-century works

the early/late fourteenth century; late fourteenth-century works

the mid to late fourteenth century; mid to late fourteenth-century works

the mid-1330s, the mid to late 1330s

Inclusive ranges should be compressed according to the scheme offered in CMS 9.64, which may be summarized as follows. Note, however, that for life dates both numbers should be given in full (e.g., 1313–1375, *not* 1313–75).

- The first number is 1–99 or 100, 200, and so on: the second number is given in full (e.g., 4–29, 100–102).
- The first number is 101–109, 201–209, and so on: only the changed element of the second number is given (e.g., 102–3)
- The first number is 110–199, 210–299, and so on: the second number uses two or more digits (e.g., 1234–37, 1290–1321)

## Punctuation

Do not use a comma after a short introductory phrase, unless a pause is strongly implied or readability would be adversely affected otherwise:

Thus Dante invites the reader to scrutinize . . .

In 1239 he wrote . . .

In the second book of *Monarchia* Dante . . .

Indeed, he did quite the opposite. . . .

First of all, Dante's admirers . . .

Do use the series comma: *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*.

Do not separate a restrictive term from its neighbor with a comma, but do use a comma to set off nonrestrictive elements.

"In his treatise *Contra falsos ecclesie professores*, which was written about 1305 . . ." (no comma after title, but comma before nonrestrictive clause)

"In the second work written in the 1340s that was composed for his new patron . . ." (there were *two* works written for the new patron, both in the 1340s)

## Spelling

Use American spelling. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* may be considered an authority in matters of spelling and hyphenation: where alternative spellings for the same term are given, use the main entry (e.g., "fueled," not "fuelled"; "toward" not "towards"). For personal names, consult *Webster's New Biographical Dictionary* or the Name Authority Headings of the Library of Congress (<http://authorities.loc.gov/>).

For possessives of singular nouns ending in *s*, including proper nouns, add an apostrophe and an *s*, observing the exceptions noted in CMS 7.20–7.22.

With regard to hyphenation, *DS* favors closing compounds that sometimes appear hyphenated (e.g., preexisting). If uncertain about whether or not to spell a term with or without a hyphen or closed up, check *Merriam-Webster's* first to verify the status of a given term, then apply the principles concerning hyphenation set forth in *CMS* 7.82–7.90. Temporary compounds that as a unit function adjectivally before a noun (unit modifiers) should be hyphenated (e.g., “she found herself engaged in a decision-making process,” *but* “decision making was not her favorite task”).

